

PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

ITALY

BY

JOHN FINNEMORE

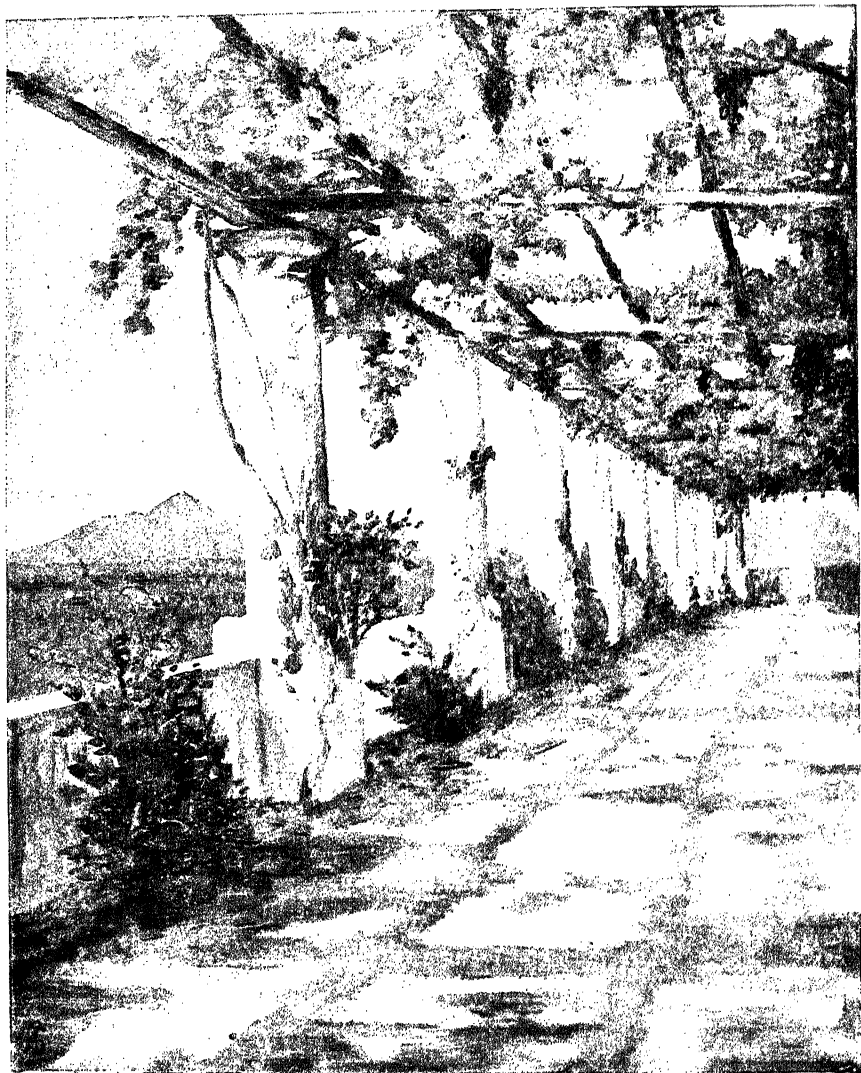
WITH TWELVE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
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A PERGOLA, LOOKING OUT ON MOUNT VESUVIUS.
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ITALY

CHAPTER I

OVER THE ALPS TO ITALY

“A land
Which was the mightiest in its old command,
And is the loveliest, and must ever be
The master-mould of Nature's heavenly hand;
Wherein were cast the heroic and the free,
The beautiful, the brave, the lords of earth and sea.”

“The commonwealth of Kings, the men of Rome!
And ever since, and now, fair Italy!
Thou art the garden of the world, the home
Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;
Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes' fertility;
Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.”

Childe Harold.

THE traveller of to-day rushes into the most lovely country of Europe by train, through tunnels pierced in the vast mountain chain of the Alps. But travellers

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of other days did not enter Italy so easily. They climbed out of France or Switzerland by roads which zigzagged up the broad flanks of the mighty hills, traversed lofty passes where winter reigned, and then their road ran down, down to the sunny Italian plain.

This is the true way to enter Italy; and there are still travellers who pass over the Alps, as all men had to do until the railway engineer ran his tunnels through the vast mountain walls which enclose Italy on the north. With the advent of the motor-car more tourists are beginning to use these ancient ways, and they do not find themselves lonely upon them, for, besides the peasantry of the districts through which they pass, there is, and has always been, a steady stream of traffic over the passes. The Italian workman, the peddler, the wayfarers of the humbler sort, have always stuck to the open road on account of its cheapness. Rather than pay railway fares, or being without the money to do so, they trudge over the Alps.

A trip over an Alpine pass in early summer is of deep interest. Climbing from the Swiss side, our carriage or motor-car mounts steadily by smooth roads cleverly cut in the slopes of the hills, so that the easiest way of ascent is taken. As we rise the air grows colder and colder, and the snow-line draws nearer and nearer. Now the wheels of the carriage crunch and grind over ice and snow, and coats and wraps are drawn closer as the travellers thread the wintry pass.

Here the road is marked by posts which stand above the snow, and glaciers hang high above the path. The greatest danger in the pass is the fall of an avalanche.

Over the Alps to Italy

A field of ice and snow will sometimes break loose from a steep slope and slide down the hillside, carrying all before it. All that comes in its path is engulfed in its rushing mass and overwhelmed. A small avalanche may at times be started by a very slight impulse, such as the rolling of a heavy carriage past the slope where a mass of ice and snow is insecurely resting, or even by voices shouting and singing in the rare thin air, but a small avalanche may prove extremely dangerous.

At last the farther side of the pass is gained, and on a clear day a halt is made to survey the scene. If we are crossing by the Splügen, the famous pass almost in the centre of the Alpine chain, which leads from Switzerland into Italy, we shall enjoy a magnificent prospect. Before us the Alps fall away to the plain of Lombardy, and the vast level, far below, stretches away until it is lost in the blue haze of immense distance.

Now the descent begins. Soon the snow is left behind, and the road winds through rocky gorges, where sombre lines of fir and pine stand rigid on the hillside. Faster and faster rolls our carriage down the easy slope, and as it goes we feel that the air gets softer and softer, and the peasants' cottages are shadowed by walnuts and sweet chestnut-trees. Down again, and wraps are thrown aside, for the keen, biting air of the icy pass is being rapidly exchanged for the glowing heat of summer.

Now the vine begins to appear, the chalets of the hills give place to houses with colonnades, the pointed church spires to tall white campaniles. The plain opens out, spreading under a glorious sky of cloudless

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blue, its little white-walled hamlets sleeping in the hot sun, its orange-groves perfuming the air. We roll on past ancient towns, whose crumbling walls are embowered in thickets of myrtle, pomegranate and oleander trees. We see the dark, lofty cypress stand, a pillar of dusky shade, against the gleaming white walls of some great villa. We are in Italy.

CHAPTER II

BESIDE AN ITALIAN LAKE

Coming down from the Splügen, the traveller arrives at the shore of Lake Como, and finds himself in the region of the Italian Lakes, those lovely sheets of water whose beauties draw hosts of admirers from all parts of Europe.

Como is a long, narrow lake with arms which run deeply into the recesses of the hills. From whatever point it may be approached, this glorious lake is full of charm, with its spreading sheet of water, blue as the sky which hangs above, its noble mountains which spring high above its shores, the towns and pretty villages which cluster along the shore and dot the pleasant slopes which run down to the water's edge. The roads leading to the lake wind among these white hamlets half hidden in rich vineyards or enfolding woodland, and at every turn of the way fresh views of the most enchanting and romantic beauty hold the traveller spellbound with the witchery of the scene.

Beside an Italian Lake

A soft blue haze envelops woodland, water, and mountain, and gives to every feature of the landscape a dreamy charm which fascinates the beholder.

Afloat, the effect is, if possible, still more striking. The eye is led gently over the smooth sheet of shining blue to the shore, where meadows and orchards and vineyards climb the slopes, past villas whose walls gleam white or pink in the sun, past churches from whose campaniles mellow bells ring out, up to the bold, rocky heights and inaccessible precipices of tall mountains, which tower far above, and whose heads in late spring are still capped with snow.

Nor is the eye ever wearied with gazing, for there is no monotony in the scene. The ever-changing effects of sun and shade, of morning and evening light, of fair weather and of storm, keep up a constant play and interplay of colour and contrast which is a fresh delight from moment to moment.

The shores of Como are dotted with numberless villas and hotels, while a fleet of little boats lies at every landing-place, with merry, dark-eyed boatmen, who are eager to row the visitors about the lake. But it may well happen, as these smiling, active fellows pull your skiff into some quiet, secluded bay, that you see their faces change as their eyes fall on a torpedo-boat lying there with steam up, as if its commander expected to be off at any instant in pursuit of some enemy or evil-doer. And so he does expect, for he is posted there to check smuggling and capture smugglers, and our merry fellows at the oars are often peaceful boatmen by day and smugglers by night.

Peeps at Many Lands

Why is this? It is because Italy is one of the most heavily taxed countries in Europe. Her frontiers bristle with custom-houses, where officers are posted to levy taxes on the goods which come into the country. It is true at home that we also lay duties and taxes on various articles, and yet have but little smuggling. But our duties are laid, in the main, on luxuries, and only slightly on necessities. In Italy a ruthless tax is laid upon the commonest necessities of the poor, as well as the luxuries of the rich. Again, there are certain articles which the Government reserves as monopolies—that is, they can only be bought from the Government officers—and, to obtain money, these articles are sold at high prices, much above their real value. Such things as salt, matches, sugar, petroleum, spirits, and tobacco are so dear that the poorer classes can hardly afford to use them.

Now, the peasantry of Italy are very poor. This most lovely land, with its many fertile plains, is so ill-governed that the people are borne down under a grievous burden of taxation. In many a picturesque hamlet, embowered in vines and olive-groves, where the myrtle gives out its delicious sweetness under a sky of the most enchanting blue, there is bitter and grinding poverty. To take one example, it is a common thing for the peasants to go to bed at sunset in the winter months because the light of a lamp is a luxury which they cannot afford. The Government levies so heavy a duty on petroleum that they are unable to buy it. But across the Swiss frontier, not far away, petroleum is cheap enough, and so are many other things which are very dear in Italy.

Beside an Italian Lake

So the young men find at once both excitement and profit in smuggling cargoes of contraband goods from one country to the other. At dead of night loads of goods are brought down from some lonely pass which leads to the frontier and carried to a solitary creek in the shores of the lake. Here the bales are swiftly embarked, and the boat is driven by strong and skilful oarsmen to some hiding-place, whence its contents will be distributed over the country-side. The smugglers find plenty of customers, for their articles are good, and they sell them at half the price of the regular traders who have had to pay the Government duty.

But what is the Government doing all this time? It is doing its utmost to catch the smugglers, and for that purpose it not only maintains torpedo-boats on the lake, but also a system of small boats. These small rowing-boats are manned by an officer and a picked crew of five oarsmen, who stand up to row, and drive the boat at great speed as they patrol the creeks, bays, and inlets at all hours of the day and night. Further, a powerful electric light has been placed in position to sweep the lake, and by night this strong searchlight turns its blinding radiance hither and thither in search of suspicious vessels.

How, then, do the smugglers escape through this close-drawn net? Ah! that brings us to another unfortunate point in Italian government. Far too many of its officials are corrupt—they can be bribed to look another way while the Government they have sworn to serve is robbed.

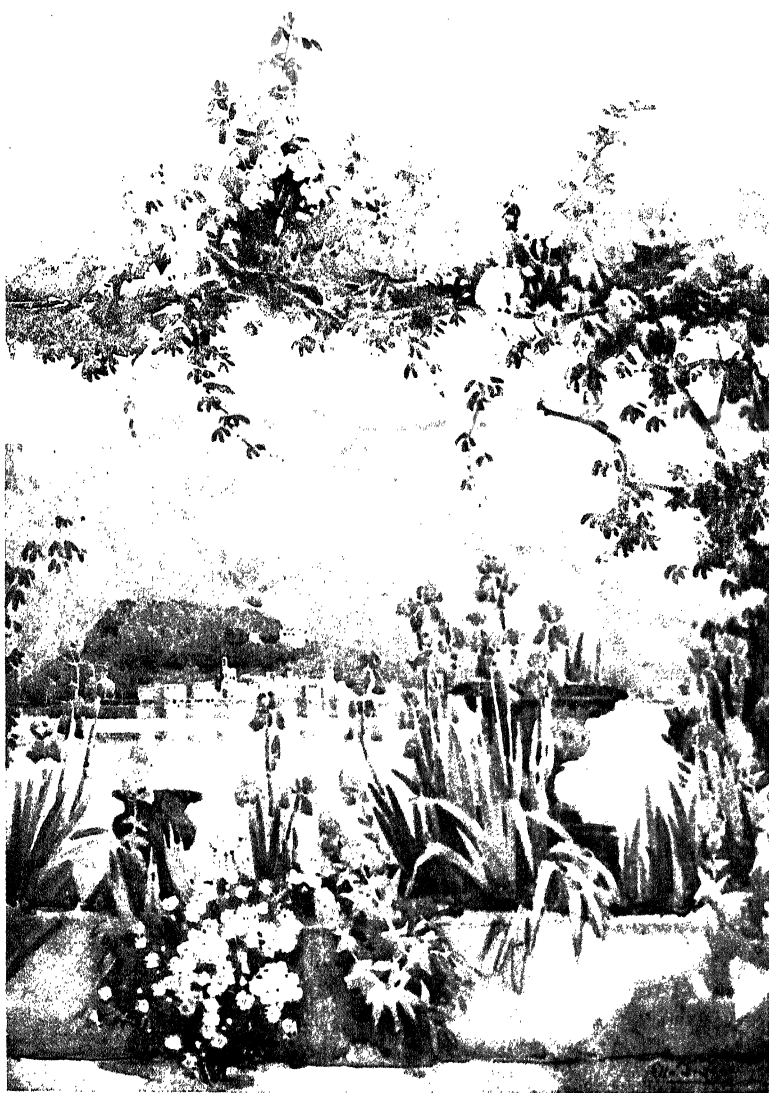
A lake-boat, laden deep in the water, steals out of a

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little creek ; the searchlight is turned another way as the smugglers glide off into the darkness. An officer is on patrol ; he searches all inlets on his beat save one. He knows perfectly well what that inlet holds. Nay, more, an officer has been known to be present at a run of smuggled goods, and to carefully count each bale and package to be sure that the smugglers handed over to him his proper share of the illegal gains. It is no wonder that smuggling flourishes along Lake Como.

As a visitor is being rowed along the lake, his boatman will often open a secret locker and bring out smuggled tobacco or cigars or other goods, and beg him to buy. But those who know the men best declare that it is very wrong to encourage them. The money thus easily earned goes in drunkenness and dissipation, and is a source of great harm to the smuggler himself.

At some points of the lake, great walls of rock spring sheer from the water and tower hundreds of feet above. On a hot day it is delightful to lie in the shadow of these precipices or row gently along their base. But caution is needed, for danger may be near. Very often there is a meadow on top of the rock far above. The peasants cut their hay in the meadows, dry it, and collect it in small stacks. On each stack is placed a boulder of rock or a big stone to prevent the hay being whirled over the precipice by a sudden storm of wind. When the peasant carries the hay from the meadow, he hurls the stones down the slopes, and they bound along and leap over the precipice, and plunge into the water far below with terrific force. Very often the overhang-



A GARDEN AT CADENABBIA, LAKE COMO. *Page 4.*

Beside an Italian Lake

ing rocks hide from his view the boat on the lake, and it is no pleasant experience for those in the skiff to see a huge stone whistle upon them and crash into the water near at hand.

The boatmen are also fishermen, for Lake Como abounds in fish. Splendid trout are taken in the nets up to twenty pounds in weight, and there are huge pike, with perch, tench, and other fish. At night you may often hear a pleasant sound of bells chiming softly from the bosom of the lake. They are the bells which the fisherman has fastened to floats to mark the position of his nets, to guide him to them in the darkness. Striking, too, is the sight of the boat which glides along in the shallow water near the shore with a great torch flaring in the bows. The light falls upon a fisherman who stands beside it with a spear in his hands. Now and again he darts his spear swiftly into the water, and strikes a fish which has been attracted by the light. There is a gleam of silver as the fish is tossed inboard, and then the fisherman poises himself anew for a fresh stroke. The thing looks perfectly simple, but is by no means so. The raw hand is likely, not only to miss his fish, but may easily overbalance himself and topple headlong into the water.

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CHAPTER III

BESIDE AN ITALIAN LAKE (*continued*)

OF the numberless villas along the shores of Lake Como, none is more interesting than the Villa of Pliny at the southern end of the lake. It takes its name from the famous Roman writer, the younger Pliny, who loved to escape from the corrupt and violent life of Rome under the Empire, and give himself up to the quiet delights of a country house amid these beautiful scenes.

Many others of the old Romans felt the charm of Como, and the lakeside was dotted by their villas. Pliny possessed several such retreats along its shores, but his name clings to this southern corner, where a splendid villa stands in a most striking position.

The Villa of Pliny is lapped in front by the waters of the lake, and behind, the hillside springs up like a wall, but a wall thickly covered with woods. So shrouded and overhung by mountains and crags is this great building that for a great part of the year it is sunless. In the height of summer the sun falls upon its front only for a few hours of the day, and a deep silence always broods over this place, standing alone in solitary grandeur.

The present house is not that which was inhabited by the great Roman philosopher. It was erected in 1570 by a great Italian noble, and has passed through

Beside an Italian Lake

various hands. It is only used for a few weeks in the year. During the most intense heat of summer it is pleasant ; at other times it is too damp and cold.

The villa has kept its connexion with the name of Pliny because of its mysterious spring, which puzzled Pliny so much, and whose movements no one can explain to-day. The marvel of this spring is its ebb and flow, and the words of Pliny, who saw it and described it nearly two thousand years ago, are just as true as ever. He says: "A spring rises in the mountain, runs down among the rocks, and is received in an artificial chamber, where one can take one's midday meal. After a short halt there, it falls into the Lake of Como. Its nature is extraordinary. Three times in the day it increases and decreases with regular rise and fall. This is plainly visible, and most interesting to watch. You lie beside it and eat your food, while you drink of the spring itself, which is intensely cold. Meantime it either rises or falls with sure and measured movements. Place a ring, or any other article you please, upon a dry spot. The water reaches and, at length, covers it ; again it slowly retires and leaves the object dry. If you watch long enough, you may see this process repeated a second and a third time."

A few miles away there is another wonderful spring, known as the Fiume di Latte (the Stream of Milk). This is a cascade of milk-white water, which bursts from a cavern in the hillside and rushes down into the lake. This, too, ebbs and flows, though not so regularly as Pliny's Spring. One day the waterfall is a rushing torrent ; the next it has reduced its flow ; the

Peeps at Many Lands

next it is almost dry. Then, just as suddenly, it bursts out again in all its former volume. Nor can these changes be dependent on the melting of snow and ice, for the torrent has been known to descend with summer force in mid-winter, and to disappear in summer when the snow-fields are melting fast. "The water of Fiume di Latte is of an icy coldness, so much so that fruit, meat, fish, or other perishable articles can be kept fresh in it for days during the hottest weather."

The excursion to Fiume di Latte is usually made from the little town of Varenna, nestling under a wooded hill and facing the sun. The hill is crowned by a tower, the last fragment of a castle, where Theodolinda, Queen of Lombardy, once dwelt. Theodolinda is a famous name in early Italian history, and she was the daughter of a King of Bavaria. In the sixth century Flavius, King of the Lombards, sent to ask for the hand of Theodolinda. He had never seen her, and in order to gain a glimpse of the lady before committing himself finally to the marriage, he accompanied his Ambassadors in disguise.

But so great was the beauty and charm of Theodolinda that Flavius loved her at first sight, and she loved him. Within a year after the marriage Flavius died suddenly, and Theodolinda was left alone to rule over Lombardy. By this time the Lombards loved her so much that they said they would accept as their King anyone whom she might choose as a second husband. She married the Duke of Turin, and converted him to Christianity, for he had been a pagan and an avowed enemy to the Pope, St. Gregory the Great. St. Gregory

Beside an Italian Lake.

was so delighted with this happy change of a powerful enemy into a friend that he sent to Theodolinda a fillet of iron, believed to have been made from one of the nails used on the Cross.

From this present springs the oldest and most famous crown in the world, the Iron Crown of Lombardy. The fillet of iron was placed in a gold crown, and the diadem is carefully preserved at the Cathedral of Monza. When the present King of Italy followed his murdered father, he took the oath and spoke to his people with the Iron Crown of Lombardy on his head.

Bellagio, the haunt of tourists, is a picturesque little town standing on a bold promontory. The view from the headland is of marvellous beauty, and embraces a vast stretch of the lake. This part of the lake is subject to sudden storms, and near Bellagio a newly-married Queen with all her bridal train was once nearly lost. In 1493 Bianca Sforza, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Milan, was married with great pomp and splendour to the King of the Romans. On the fourth day after her marriage Bianca, travelling to rejoin her husband, who had gone to prepare a suitable reception for her in his Empire, embarked on the Lake of Como in a magnificent State galley driven by forty picked rowers. Thirty other vessels, filled with her train and escort, followed the splendid barge. Bellagio was reached in safety, and the night spent there. The next morning the galleys had scarcely left the shore when a sudden and terrible storm lashed the lake into foam. All day the rowers strove to urge the galley back to the land, but their efforts were vain, and it was nightfall

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before the bride regained Bellagio, after a day of fearful tempest.

In the next century a lady of the same house might have been Queen of England had she wished. Henry VIII. wished to marry the Duchess Cristina Sforza, but that lady was too clever for him, and made the delightful and witty reply "that unfortunately she had only one head; but that, had she two, one of them should be at the King of England's service."

CHAPTER IV

THE LOMBARD PLAIN

AT the southern foot of the Alps we find "that vast tract that lies between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea, and which is still distinguished by the vague appellation of Lombardy. This beautiful plain, fenced, as it were, by its snowy ridges, smiling like a garden, spreading like an ocean, with a hundred rivers rushing from the hills, a hundred towns glittering on the plain, exhibits all the vigour of eternal youth."

The Lombard Plain forms the most wealthy and prosperous district of Italy. The land is better cultivated than in the southern parts of the peninsula; the townspeople are more alert and enterprising. The Lombard of old days was well known as a merchant and a money-changer; the Lombard to-day is a keen business man, and thrives in whatever pursuit he may undertake. The plain contains many important towns,

The Lombard Plain

chief among them being Milan, one of the greatest of Italian cities. The glory of Milan is its magnificent cathedral, the Duomo, a glorious building of white marble. Seen in the bright Italian sunshine, the great building is a dazzling picture of wonderful beauty. It is covered from pavement to tower with statues and richly-wrought sculpture, and from every corner spring sharp spires of glittering white marble. The whole mass looks like a beautiful piece of frost-work which has been rendered permanent. This impression becomes stronger when we learn that the design of this noble building was taken from the form of Monte Rosa, the great Alp which lies in sight of the cathedral. The spires of the Duomo resemble in the most striking fashion the sharp splinters of icy crags which spring from the shoulders of the great mountain. "On a clear day the view, from the roof, of the Alps is a sight neither to be forgotten nor described. The huge mass of Monte Rosa, shining like silver in the sun, is perhaps the most conspicuous feature, with many of the higher peaks around Zermatt. Behind rise the tips of the loftier peaks of the Bernese Oberland. In the middle distance is the Plain of Lombardy, with its white towns and villages, each with its church and campanile. In the foreground, surrounding the cathedral, lies the city, with its streets and houses, churches, palaces, and theatres."

The word "theatres" brings to mind the immense opera-house, La Scala, of which the Milanese are so proud. This famous building has for more than a hundred years been in the forefront in bringing out

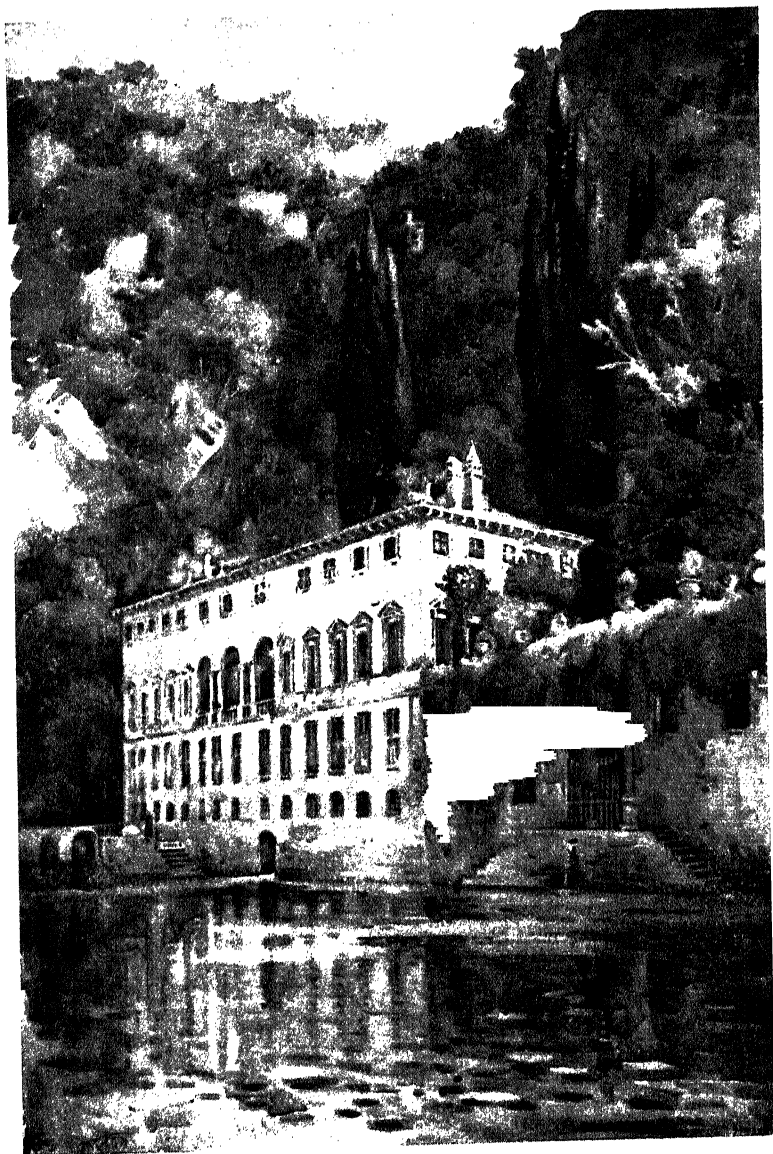
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great operas and wonderful singers, and the greatest of the latter do not consider their careers complete until they have sung at La Scala.

But Milan was famous for music long before La Scala was built. It was at Milan that Mozart brought out his first opera when he was only fourteen years old. This wonderful genius wrote music in his infancy, and at fourteen was a master. But when his opera was nearly finished there was a panic among those who were to bring it out. The great prima donna, the chief singer, was not willing to appear. How was it likely, she asked, that a little boy of fourteen could compose music fit for her to sing? The music was shown her. She tried it over, and her astonishment was complete. It was lovely, and she was now eager to take the part. The first night came, and the opera was given. It was a triumphant success, and the vast and delighted audience cheered to the very echo the little boy who came forward to make his bow as the composer of the opera.

Leaving the city for the plains, we find Lombardy a land full of charm. The road winds by hills clothed with chestnut and tulip trees, and crested with cypress and olive. Campaniles and towers shine white from amid the bright green of the vineyards, and under the hedges trail the broad leaves of the water-melon, half shading the great fruit swelling in the sun. Then the road turns under a dark portal in old grey walls, and enters an ancient town, and wanders through it, and out into the open country again.

On every hand lie the holdings of peasant or farmer,



THE VILLA PLINY, LAKE COMO. *Page 10.*

The Lombard Plain

and the busy North Italian is to be seen in his fields from dawn to dark, tending his many crops. Here and there long lines of mulberry-trees are growing, for the rearing of silkworms is a great industry of Lombardy. This business is not so prosperous as it formerly was. Disease made dreadful ravages among both the silkworms and the mulberry-trees some half-century ago, and almost killed the silk industry. It has now recovered to a large extent, but the profits are nothing like so large as they used to be.

Another blow at the pocket of the Lombard peasant was a blight which affected the vines, and destroyed almost all the vineyards of Lombardy. A new stock of hardier vines has now been planted, and the wine trade is making way steadily.

But of all the terrors of the North Italian farmer, none is so dreadful as hail. Sometimes, on a summer day, when the crops are in full growth and everything looks promising for a plentiful harvest, a vast black cloud draws over the sky. The storm bursts in thunder, lightning, and heavy hailstones. The latter fall with such terrific force that often within ten to fifteen minutes they will destroy the whole of the standing crops, leaving the fields a whitened desert. Nor can the prudent protect themselves against this dreadful danger. So widespread are the ravages of hail that insurance companies will not insure farmers against it.

But of late science has begun to assist the unfortunate people who thus see the labours of many months destroyed in a few minutes. Cannons are fired at the

Peeps at Many Lands

storm-clouds to burst them. The cannons are shaped like sugar-loaves, and are loaded with a special kind of powder. When the storm threatens, the cannons are discharged and the hail falls, not in the form of the dreaded lumps of ice, but as fine snow or sharp sleet. "In stormy summer weather a stranger in Northern Italy would think himself on a battle-field from the noise of artillery which he hears all around him."

The Lombard peasant lives in the most frugal fashion. His morning meal is of polenta, made of maize flour, and this he washes down with water. His dinner is of soup made of rice thickened with cabbages and turnips, and a little lard mingled with it to give a flavour. He also takes raw vegetables with oil and vinegar, and the day when he adds eggs, cheese, and dried fish to his bill of fare is looked upon as a time of feasting. Butcher's meat he scarcely ever buys, except for a grand affair such as a wedding ; but he searches the fields and hedgerows for hedgehogs, frogs, and snails, and the latter in many parts are considered great delicacies. The wine which he used to drink freely has now become a luxury. Disease among the vines has caused the common wine of the country to become much dearer, and he does not taste it except on feast-days.

The Queen of the Adriatic

CHAPTER V

THE QUEEN OF THE ADRIATIC

FROM Lombardy the railway runs on eastward across the plains, which soon become a marsh with long, coarse grass waving about little lakes and long, winding pools of water between banks of sand. The east wind brings a fresh salt tang from the sea, and we know that the Adriatic is at hand, and look out and see the broad, bright lagoon spread before us. And, rising in the distance over the blue waves, a host of towers, domes, and campaniles spring skywards, lifting themselves, as it were, from the bosom of the sea. It is Venice. "There stands the city of St. Mark—miraculous, a thing for giants to wonder at, and fairies to copy if they could!

"The wonder leaps upon the traveller all at once, arriving over the broad plains of Italy, through fields of wheat and gardens of olives, through vineyards and swamps of growing rice, across broad rivers and monotonous flats of richest land. The means of arrival, indeed, are commonplace enough; but, lo! in a moment you step out of the commonplace railway-station into the lucid stillness of the water city—into poetry and wonderland.

"The moon rising above shines upon pale palaces, dim and splendid, and breaks in silver arrows and broad gleams of whiteness upon the ripple and soft glistening

Peeps at Many Lands

movement of the canal, still, yet alive with a hundred reflections, and a soft pulsation and twinkle of life. The lights glitter above and below—every star, every lamp doubled. Then comes the measured sweep of the oars, and you are away on the silent, splendid road, all darkling, yet alive. Not a sound less harmonious and musical than the soft plash of the water against the marble steps and grey walls, the waves' plash against your boat, the wild cry of the boatmen as they round each sharp corner, or the singing of some wandering boatful of musicians on the Grand Canal, disturbs the quiet. Across the flat Lido, from the Adriatic, comes a little breath of fresh wind; and when, out of a maze of narrow water-lanes, you shoot out into the breadth and glorious moonlight of the Grand Canal, and see the lagoon go widening out, a plain of dazzling silver, into the distance, and great churches and palaces standing up pale against the light, what words can describe the novel, beautiful scene!"

The Grand Canal of Venice is the most splendid of the myriad waterways which thread this city of the sea. The Rialto, the most beautiful bridge of Venice, crosses it in a single span, and it is lined on either hand with the splendid homes of the ancient Venetian nobility. It is the most wonderful street in the world: its houses are palaces, its carriages are gondolas, its buses are steamboats, the waves lap its doorsteps. Hundreds of other canals branch out in every direction, and serve as streets to this silent city where no wheels roll, no whips crack, and where the toot of the motor-car is not

The Queen of the Adriatic

heard. Whence sprung this wondrous city of the waters?

More than fifteen hundred years ago there were troublous times in Lombardy. Barbarian hordes from the north swept into the fruitful plain, and harried it with fire and sword. Fleeing before these savage invaders, a people called the Veneti took refuge on the mud-banks which lay amid the lagoon at the mouth of the River Lido. Here they built their huts of mud and wattle, became fishermen, and lived in safety.

In time they became sailors and traders. None knew the waterways and lagoons as they did, nowhere could be found more bold and skilful seamen. Venice grew rapidly, and formed herself into a republic. Century after century passed, and she prospered in marvellous fashion. Her merchants became nobles, her ruler a great Prince called the Doge, the Duke of Venice. Through her hands passed the commerce between Europe and the East, and vast wealth was gained by her sons.

This wealth they used to beautify the city which they loved so much. Into every mud-bank and ooze-spit piles were driven until a sound foundation had been secured. Upon these foundations rose splendid palaces and noble churches, built of stone, of coloured marble, of every material that was rich and rare. And when these glorious buildings were finished they were decorated within and without by painters, sculptors, workers in mosaic, and enriched by the treasures which the Venetian navies brought home from every city which they seized and sacked.

Peeps at Many Lands

Nowhere can this burning passion to adorn their beloved city be better traced than in the famous San Marco, the Church of St. Mark, the Cathedral of Venice. St. Mark's is one of the wonders of the world, and its piazza is always haunted by lovers of the beautiful, gazing upon this marvellous building, and entering to see the glories within. From the square it scarcely looks like a church. It has no towers, no spires, and is crowned with domes like a mosque. Its porticoes gleam with mosaics on a ground of gold, and four magnificent horses, cast in bronze, rear themselves before an immense stained-glass window. Its pillars are of porphyry and ancient marbles, its gables are adorned with splendid statues, and it is beautified with a thousand spoils of wealth and art seized in the days of the greatness of Venice. "A strange and mysterious, exquisite and barbaric building, an immense heaping up of riches, a pirates' church formed of pieces, stolen or won from every civilization."

"When one enters from the bright sun, St. Mark's appears dim and dark. At first you can see nothing; but as your eyes become accustomed to the darkness, colours begin to grow upon you out of the gloom. Some minutes must elapse before you realize that the floor, which at first you took to be of deep-toned grey stone, is a mosaic composed of thousands of differently coloured marbles—that you are walking on precious marbles of peacock hues. Golden gleams above your head attract you to the domed ceiling, and, to your delight and amazement, you discover that it is formed entirely of gold mosaic. You are passing a dim recess,

The Queen of the Adriatic

and you see a blurred mass of rich colour ; after a time you realize that you are looking at a famous masterpiece by one of the great Italian painters. You sit there as in a dream ; and one by one the pictures and the mosaics, the Gothic images, the cupolas, the arches, the marbles, the alabaster, the porphyry, and the jasper appear to you—until what was darkness and gloom appears to be teeming and vibrating with colour."

In a dim and hidden corner of this great church stands a quaint little statue to which a story hangs. It is the figure of an old man, leaning on crutches, with a finger on his lip. He it was who built St. Mark's, and he was brought to Venice from the East, for his renown as an architect had spread far and wide. He was a dwarf, ugly and bow-legged ; but he agreed to build the splendid church on condition that one of its chief ornaments should be a statue of himself, and the Doge was compelled to assent. But one day the Doge heard the old man mutter to himself that he could not build the place just in the way he wished. "Then," said the Doge, "I am free from my promise." And he put up only a small statue of the great architect in a hidden corner.

The Palace of the Doges is still to be seen, but the name and power of the Dukes of Venice have long since departed. In old days there was no more splendid sight than the annual feast, when the Doge went in state to acknowledge the union of the splendid city with the sea, which was at once its protection and its source of wealth. Rowed in the State barge, and attended by the splendid vessels of the Venetian nobles,

Peeps at Many Lands

he went to a certain spot, and there dropped into the waters a ring of priceless value as a token that Venice was the bride of the sea.

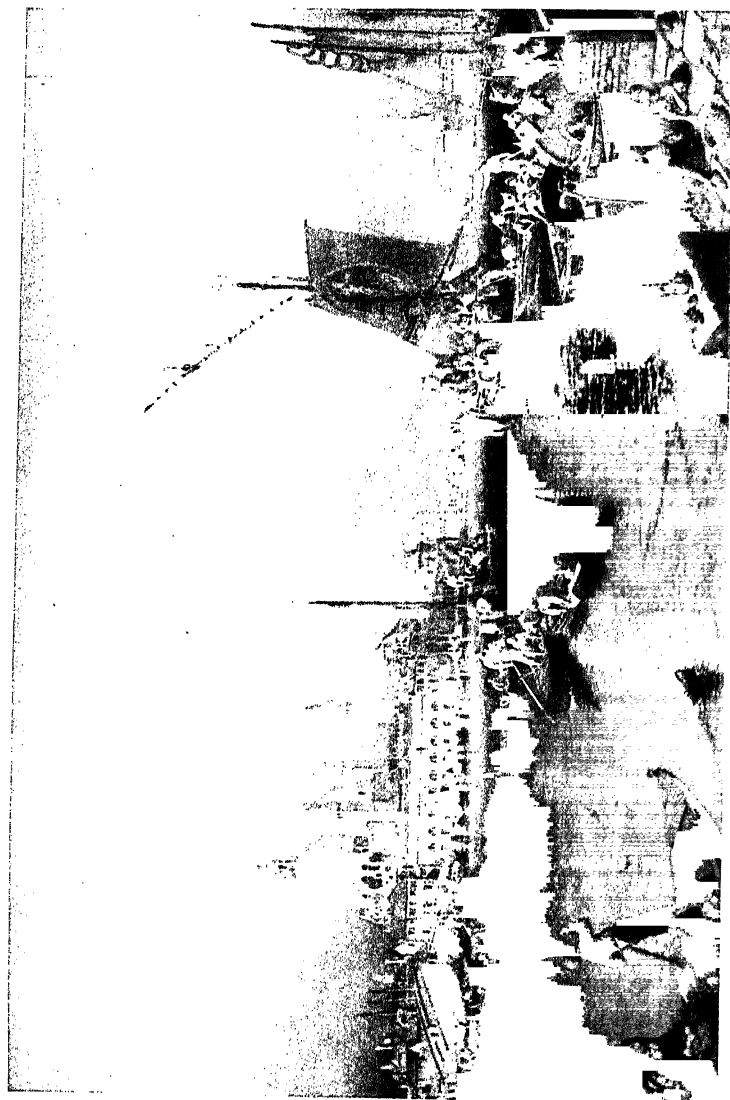
Springing across a canal beside the Palace of the Doges is the most famous bridge of Venice, the Bridge of Sighs. It leads from the State palace to the State prison, and across it has been led many a prisoner who, with a despairing sigh, took from its windows a last glimpse of the sunny world of freedom, for before him lay either a cruel death or imprisonment for life in the gloomy dungeons where no ray of sunshine ever fell.

CHAPTER VI

IN TUSCANY

THE province of Tuscany lies between the Northern Apennines and the Mediterranean, and is a delightful land of little olive-crowned hills, of quaint cities, grey-walled and sun-browned, lying in the green lap of meadows and vineyards, while far away snowy mountain tops close in the lovely scene. Within her borders lie some of the most famous cities of Italy, and her tongue is that adopted as correct Italian.

There is a bewildering confusion of tongues in Italy. Each province has not only its own mode of speech, but many local dialects as well. These often differ so widely from each other that an uneducated man, speaking only his own local Italian, is often at sea when quite



ENTRANCE TO THE GRAND CANAL VENICE ITALY

In Tuscany

a short distance from home, and fails to understand the people. As one writer remarks, "A mountain, a hedge, a running brook is sufficient to mark off a new language." Some time ago an Italian writer published a volume containing one story of Boccaccio translated into about seven hundred different dialects of the peninsula.

The Tuscan tongue is the general speech when educated people from different parts of Italy meet, but it does not follow that they use it at home. With the exception of Rome, they would drop into their own local speech, and that would be quite beyond the power of a foreigner to grasp, even if he were an excellent Italian scholar in the usual sense of the word.

This pleasant land is tilled by the dark-eyed, handsome Tuscan peasantry, whose little villages with simple houses of stone dot the landscape in all directions. Their ploughs and carts are drawn by the splendid white oxen of Tuscany, and where the ground is too steep or too rough for wheels to run, the oxen are harnessed to the *trezzia*, a kind of rude sleigh. It is formed of a small platform attached to a bent shaft, and the oxen are fastened on either side of the shaft, the latter running up between the two animals. When the sleigh is intended to carry passengers, a large basket is strapped to it. The basket contains a seat for two people, and is fitted with a slanting back and cushion. When going up a hill-side with a pair of oxen pulling slowly and steadily, the motion is not unpleasing. But coming down is a very different affair. The *trezzia* rocks and bumps and lurches until the occupants fear they will

Peeps at Many Lands

be shaken to pieces, and think it would be better to get out and walk.

The chief river of Tuscany is that famous stream, the Arno, on which stand Florence and Pisa. Florence is a very great city to-day, and of her we shall speak again. Pisa has seen the days of her greatness pass, and she is now a quiet, dreamy place, visited by those who wish to see the wonderful buildings which cluster round a corner of her ancient walls.

Here lies an open grassy space where stand four splendid structures. The first that catches the eye is the famous Leaning Tower. It looks familiar at once, for you have seen so many pictures of it. Apart from its curious position, it is noteworthy for its own charm. "It looks like some fairy tower, composed of tier upon tier of marble columns and delicate tracery, and inclines gently forward, as though weary of the burden of its own beauty."

The Leaning Tower springs 179 feet from the ground in the form of a vast pillar. It is hollow within, and when you enter and stand at the foot it seems as if you were at the bottom of a deep well, with the bells—for it is the campanile, or belfry, of the Cathedral near at hand—hanging at the top. In the circular wall is a flight of 300 steps leading to the top, whence you may enjoy a splendid outlook over mountain, plain, and sea.

As you ascend you can clearly perceive that the tower is not upright, and it leans over to one side to the extent of 13 feet. This was caused by the giving way of part of the foundation. But for all that, the

In Tuscany

tower remains firm and strong. It has stood since 1174, and seems likely to stand.

The Cathedral, the Baptistery, and the Campo Santo complete the four famous structures. The Cathedral and the Baptistery are most beautiful buildings, and the Campo Santo is reared upon sacred earth—upon 1,500 loads of soil brought from Calvary long ago. In the Cathedral is a very ancient and famous picture of the Madonna and Child, which is covered with seven veils, and these veils are never removed save upon very important occasions. The shrine where this picture is kept is surrounded by many offerings. This is a common practice in the churches of Italy. A worshipper prays for a blessing or for deliverance from some peril, and if he believes that his prayer is granted he puts up before the shrine some object to commemorate the favour received. Thus a sailor, saved from shipwreck, puts up a silver model of a ship before his favourite saint; the lame man, recovering from his infirmity, hangs up his crutches, and so on.

In the Cathedral of Pisa there hangs a little pink frock before the shrine. It has hung there since the last unveiling of the picture in 1897. On that occasion a terrible disaster occurred. The church was packed to overflowing, when a cry of "Fire!" was raised, and there was a wild stampede. People were trampled to death, and many were badly injured. "One poor mother was knocked down, and her little child, not two years old, was whirled away from her among the struggling crowd, she saw not whither. When the

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ambulance came from the neighbouring hospital to recover the dead and wounded, the child was found under a bench, smiling and happy, a little dazed, but without so much as a bruise. The grateful mother has put the little pink frock it wore at the time in a glass case and placed it in the Cathedral, thereby rendering public thanks to Heaven for so marvellous an escape."

Before leaving Pisa, we must note one very interesting local feature—the fine herd of camels which have become native to the Tuscan soil. In the neighbourhood of the town a camel-train is no uncommon sight, each long-legged, humped creature marching steadily along with its load of about 1,000 pounds of wood, cut in the forests near at hand. These camels have been bred near Pisa for close upon 200 years. Many attempts have been made to rear camels in other parts of Italy, but in vain, nor can they be reared elsewhere in Tuscany than at Pisa. Camels need a hot and dry climate. Cold and wet will kill them off rapidly. Above all things, the camels dislike rain. If they are in the open, they huddle together closely under trees. If they are in their sheds, they will not come out on a rainy day, even though their food-racks are empty and there is plenty to eat outside.

But now we must leave Pisa, and go up-stream to the most famous Tuscan city of all, Florence, the City of Flowers.

The City of Flowers

CHAPTER VII

THE CITY OF FLOWERS

THE famous and beautiful city of Florence lies on the banks of the River Arno, surrounded by smiling slopes where vineyards and orchards are set thickly among meadows and corn-fields, and looked upon from afar off by the lofty Apennines. But she is famous for much more than the beauty of her position, this stately and splendid old city. She is famous for her noble palaces, her quaint and picturesque streets, her wonderful churches, and for the wealth of art treasures in picture and statue, in bronze and marble, with which her sons have enriched her.

Her story is long and very stormy. For centuries the streets rang with the noise of battle. She was a small republic where rival parties fought for supremacy, and dyed her streets and walls with their blood. Her history rings with the long strife of the two great rival families, Guelf against Ghibelline, whose struggles rent her in twain, and whose bitter combats were fought out in her narrow causeways.

But Florence had other sons who have given her greater fame than either Guelf or Ghibelline. To-day the noise of the far-off battles is dim, and their dust has settled and covered the renown of the warriors; but the world still reads the poems of Dante, greatest of the sons of Florence, and admires the books and

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pictures of other Florentines, lesser men than the great poet, but still men of world-wide fame.

We can take but a peep at this city of marvellous charm, and we will go straight to its famous Piazza del Duomo—the “history-haunted square,” as Ruskin calls it—and glance round a group of buildings scarcely to be equalled in any other city of the world. Here stand the Cathedral, the Campanile, the splendid belfry, and the Baptistery.

The Cathedral, the Duomo of Florence, is a great and noble building entered by several doors, all different and all beautiful. Inside there is no glare of splendour, only vast, dim, tranquil spaces, so that one steps out of a bustling, sunny piazza into a grey quietude which seems far off and distant from the workaday world, and full of repose and devotion.

High overhead springs the vast arch of the lofty dome, which is covered outside with red tiles, and is a great landmark, as it rises above the roofs of the city. It is a noble piece of work, inlaid with coloured marbles, and enriched with splendid carvings and statues.

Beside the Cathedral stands the Shepherd's Tower, the belfry of glorious beauty designed by Giotto, the shepherd-boy. Ruskin calls it “that serene height of mountain alabaster, coloured like a morning cloud and chased like a sea-shell.”

The Campanile is adorned with many-coloured marbles, the delicate and lovely shades running from purest white to crimson and green and onyx, with noble statues and beautiful medallions. Giotto designed

The City of Flowers

it, and it was beautified by other immortals of Florence who lived in the golden age of Florentine art. Since the fourteenth century the Campanile has stood and served the purpose which it serves to-day. The bells call the citizens to prayer, and thrice a day it gives the signal for the *Ave Maria* to all the other city towers.

The Baptistery of Florence stands across the square—the venerable Church of St. John the Baptist, where still the tiny Florentines are brought to the font and made children of the Church. In this most ancient and beautiful place the Florentines, whose names are famous for ever, were brought to the priest, and were baptized in the shadow of the great bronze figure of St. John, who raises his hands in blessing. The glory of the Baptistery is its famous bronze doors, wrought with so much beauty that Michael Angelo declared them worthy to be the gates of Paradise.

Near at hand is a plain building, the home of the most striking institution of Florence, the Misericordia, the Brothers of Mercy. In this brotherhood vast numbers are enrolled of all ranks, from King to beggar, and it is their duty to succour the sick, to carry the injured to hospital, to bear the dead to the grave. A number of the brothers are always ready for duty, and, as soon as a call comes for their services, they don black robes with a curious pointed hood which conceals the face, and take up the litter which is at hand, and hasten to their task.

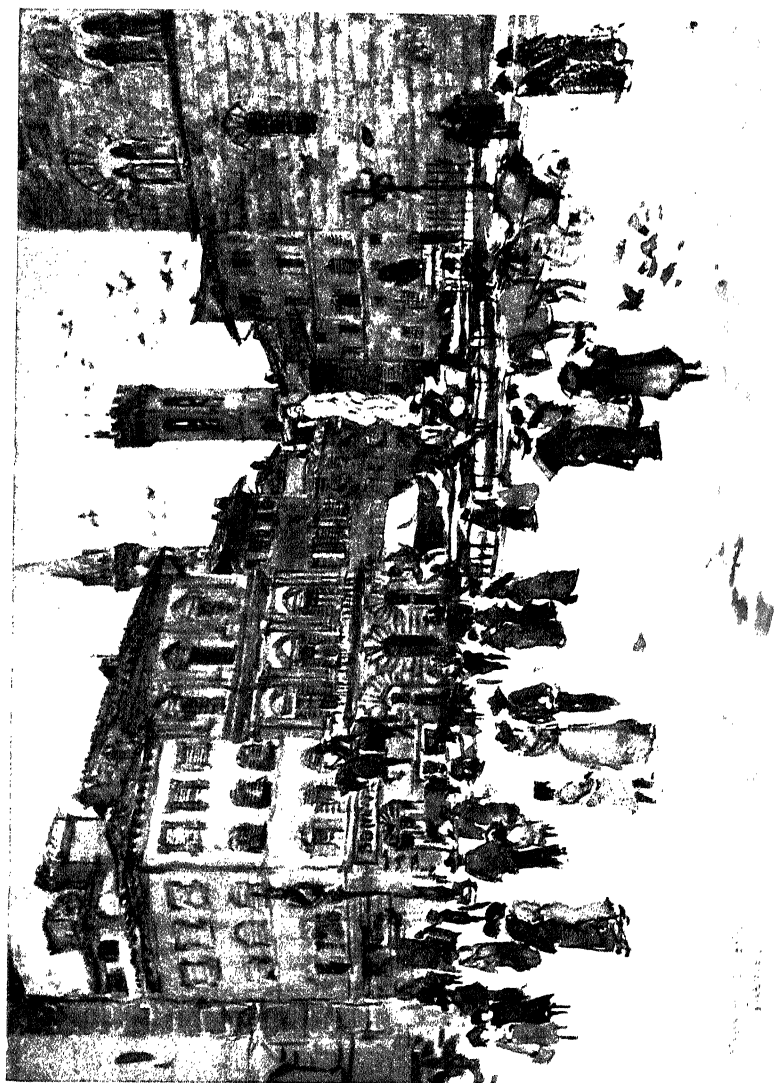
There is no more familiar sight in the city than the small procession, robed in solemn black, which swings

Peeps at Many Lands

along with its litter shoulder high, and is greeted everywhere with the doffed hat. If the burden be a corpse, the procession is formed as night falls, and is a most striking scene. In front goes a priest with crucifix and light, repeating, as he walks, the Burial Psalm. The Brothers of Mercy make the responses as they march, the bearing party with their shoulders under the bier, and those who are to relieve them and carry in turn, holding great blazing torches which light the way. No one knows the name or rank of the brethren on duty, nor may anyone offer the latter the smallest reward save "a cup of cold water."

The centre of Florentine city life is the splendid square where stands the Palazzo Vecchio, the grand old palace raised nearly seven hundred years ago as a residence for the Chief Magistrate of Justice. In front of this grim and powerful fortress, with its great and noble tower, the life of Florence ebbs and flows to-day, as it has done for so many centuries. The history of the city clings closely about this grand old building, which has seen riots, revolts, executions, scenes of public and private torture; has been the home of Chief Magistrates or of Grand Dukes, as forms of Government changed; and is now occupied by the council which deals with the municipal affairs of Florence.

The square before it seethes with Florentine life—above all on Fridays, when, after market, a vast throng of townspeople and peasants from the country round about pack it full from side to side. "As a rule, the Tuscan peasant is a graceful specimen of humanity, dark and intelligent-looking, with a delightful habit of



PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA, WITH THE
PALAZZO VECCHIO, FLORENCE. D. C. 12.

The City of Flowers

gesticulating with his hands in a manner which makes it almost possible for him to dispense with words. In winter these peasants wear long coats in wonderful shades of bright brown and a peculiar vivid green, with collars and cuffs of fur, and in summer they are clad from head to foot in cool linen. Among the gesticulating groups, cabs and carriages, with much shouting and cracking of whips, slowly thread their way, scattering to right and left the ever-shifting, brightly-coloured crowd."

The square is decorated with some of the grandest statues of Florence, but there is also a plain slab or stone in the pavement before the palace which draws much attention. This slab marks the spot where Savonarola, the great preacher and reformer, was put to death in 1498. Savonarola was the Prior of the Convent of St. Mark, and his soul was greatly troubled by the wickedness of the time. Florence was ruled by Lorenzo the Magnificent, and the city stood at the height of its power and the zenith of its glory. But Lorenzo, his Court, and his people, were wicked and corrupt, and Savonarola thundered against the evils of the time, and tried to turn men to better and purer ways.

So great was his eloquence that men were forced to listen to him and heed his words. For a time it seemed as if he were about to succeed, and turn the Florentines from their evil lives. But his foes proved too many and too strong for him. The rulers of his own Church were as bitter against him as any, and in the end he was condemned to death. Accompanied by two faithful

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monks, who died with their master, Savonarola was burned at the stake, and his ashes were cast into the Arno.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME FLORENTINE CUSTOMS

THE Florentines have plenty of holidays and feast-days, and, like all other Tuscans, they are a laughing, pleasure-loving people. The fun of their year commences with the carnival which begins at Christmas and lasts until Shrove Tuesday. This is the great season of merry-making, when parties and entertainments are given, and the stalls are loaded with toys and sweets for children. But the great day of the children's feast is Epiphany—"Twelfth Day," the day before Old Christmas Day. This festival corresponds with that of "Santa Claus" in Northern Europe. The children put their shoes ready, and hope that during the night "La Befana" will fill them with gifts. "La Befana" is an old woman who roams over the earth for ever, like the Wandering Jew, and on the night of Epiphany she fills the shoes of all good children with pretty things. Then the children always go to the Epiphany fair, where they buy little glass trumpets and fill the air with shrill blasts.

As soon as Lent begins, all popular festivities cease. But now the people throng to the Lenten fairs, which are held every Sunday at one or other of the city gates.

Some Florentine Customs

At these fairs there are sold all sorts of sweetmeats and cakes and trinkets, chief among the eatables being nuts which have been blessed by the priest, and little cakes which can be obtained only at this time of the year. The first three fairs are known as the "Fair of the Curious," the "Fair of the Furious," and the "Fair of the Lovers." The fourth is the least important of the series, and the fifth is the most important, and causes much excitement among the Florentines. It is the "Fair of Contracts," and here forthcoming marriages are announced, and the happy couples are present to receive the congratulations and good wishes of their friends. The sixth is called the "Fair of the Rejected," where disappointed lovers console themselves as well as they may.

But no one takes much thought of them, for now every mind is fixed on the greatest festival of the Florentine year, the world-famous "Feast of the Dove." On Easter Eve a car is set aflame by a dove, and in this ceremony of the "Burning of the Car" not only is every Florentine interested, but every peasant throughout Tuscany; for there is a fixed belief in every peasant mind that just as the ceremony goes well or ill, so will their crops go well or ill that year.

The origin of this curious custom goes back to the First Crusade, when a young knight of Florence brought back from the Holy Land some of the sacred fire which is kindled every Easter Eve in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. There are two stories which tell of the manner in which he conveyed this precious fire to his native city. One says that he rode his horse

Peeps at Many Lands

backward in order to shield the flame with his body ; another says that he enclosed it in an iron ball, which he rolled along with his foot. But both stories agree that when he reached Florence the people thought his movements so strange that they ran after him, shouting "Pazzo ! Pazzo !" — "Madman ! Madman !" In this manner the knight's family gained the name of the Pazzi, a celebrated name in Italian history.

From that day to this on every Easter Eve has been celebrated the "Burning of the Car" with sacred fire. The ceremony is as popular to-day as it was in the Middle Ages, and from early morning vast crowds of peasants, townsfolk, and sightseers pack themselves into the Piazza del' Duomo, in front of the great west door of the Cathedral.

The car is a huge wooden affair, festooned with fireworks and decorated with ribbons in the national colours of Italy—red, white, and green. It is drawn through the streets by four oxen white as milk, whose horns are tipped with gold. It halts before the Cathedral in the midst of the expectant crowd, who await the coming of the dove. The peasants are breathless with excitement and anxiety. If the car be set on fire bravely, the harvest will be good and abundant ; if the fire fails, then corn and fruit, too, will fail. No one can tear this belief from the heart of the Tuscan *contadine*.

The little white dove is purely artificial, and it slides along a wire which runs from the high altar along the Cathedral, out through the west door, and straight to the top of the car. At that point of the Mass

Some Florentine Customs

where the Archbishop of Florence comes to the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*—"Glory to God in the Highest"—he sets in motion the dove, which, with a light in its mouth, darts away along the wire towards the car.

Outside there is a breathless silence as the vast crowd waits for the dove to appear. When it shoots out into the sunlight, a tremendous shout of welcome arises, and then a thrice tremendous shout as it is seen that the ceremony is successful, and that the fireworks are blazing and exploding merrily. The dove turns and flies back, followed by the thanks and blessings of the happy peasants, who now look forward to a prosperous year. The oxen are once more yoked to the car, and it is drawn to the palace of the Pazzi, where more fireworks are exploded in honour of the great Crusader, and the "Feast of the Dove" is over.

CHAPTER IX

AMONG THE APENNINES

THE Apennines form the backbone of Italy, and almost everywhere may be seen from the plains which lie between their broad flanks and the coast. The peasants who live on these great hills are herdsmen rather than farmers, though here and there a strip of corn-field shines golden in autumn on some narrow terrace. This land is not turned with the plough, for on these steep slopes the plough is unknown. It is attacked with the *zappa*, a broad-bladed pick, which is swung

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with great power and driven deeply into the soil, turning it over well.

But, in the main, the meal-sack is filled from the groves of chestnut which stand thick along the hill-sides. The chestnut-gathering is the real harvest of the mountaineers, and it is a very busy time. About the middle of October, old and young troop off to the woods, where the glossy brown chestnuts are showering down freely as the winds of autumn blow. They are well provided with sacks and bags, and wear their oldest clothes, for it is rough work. The forest is often damp and muddy from the rains, the thorns and briars must not frighten the pickers from the underwood, where many nuts have fallen, and if a heavy shower comes they get wet to the skin.

They are very glad when the weather is fine, and then the woods ring with jokes and laughter as the nimble fingers fill the big sacks. A good picker will fill a sack in a day, and a very quick hand will fill a sack and a half. The chestnuts are carried home, dried, and ground, and the meal is used to make the *necci*, the chestnut-flour cakes which form so great a share of the food of the hill-folk. Every house has its drying-room, where the fresh chestnuts are heaped on a wooden framework, below which a wood fire burns. The chestnuts are left in the heat and smoke for three days and nights. The outer husk becomes as black as coal, but this is easily broken off, and the inside is white and sweet and hard. The dried nuts are now ground in a mill, and the meal is packed away in a big press. Here it gets as hard almost as a stone, and on

Among the Apennines

baking-day the portion needed is chopped out with a hatchet or heavy knife.

To make the *necci* the housewife first mixes chestnut-flour and water in a big wooden bowl till she has a paste which looks like thick pink cream. Then she takes an upright iron frame and sets it beside the fire-place, where a number of round flat stones are getting very hot. She has also a pile of large fresh green chestnut-leaves.

She begins by placing a hot stone at the bottom of the iron frame. Upon this she lays some leaves, and upon the leaves she ladles a layer of paste. This she covers with leaves, and now comes another hot stone. And so she goes on with hot stones, leaves, and paste until the frame is full. She leaves the latter for a short time, then unpacks it, for the cakes are soon cooked by the heated stones. The *necci* now look like pieces of pinkish-brown leather, and seem just as tough to the jaws of the stranger. He is certain to have a fit of indigestion if he tries to get through one, but the mountaineers thrive on them.

The children of the hills are very busy little creatures. From an early age they have to do something to help the family fortunes along, and they do it with a will. The boy herds the flock of goats, the girl watches the sheep. If there be no goats to watch, the boy has to look after the cow and cut its food. He is off to the wood with a sack to gather leaves and young shoots, for the mountain cow does not get much grass or hay. In winter it has to get along on dried leaves and ferns.

Peeps at Many Lands

But the girls have generally a little flock to guard, for a few sheep are of great service to furnish wool. This is spun on the distaff, and supplies the family with stockings and woollen garments. The little shepherdess leads her sheep to the woods, where they feed all day, and very often she has her distaff with her, and sits in the shade and spins. She is very busy, too, at the time of the chestnut-gathering. If her parents do not need her help, there are always people glad of an extra pair of hands. For wages she receives food and lodging during the harvest, and a sack of nuts besides.

The hill-towns are very old. As a rule they are far older than the cities of the plains below. They often cling to the sides of cliffs; they are perched on the top of precipitous rocks, and many a one—

“Like an eagle’s nest
Hangs on the crest
Of purple Apennine.”

The visitor to-day wonders why people ever built in such out-of-the-way spots, so difficult to reach. There are plenty of hill towns and villages among the Apennines to which wheeled carriages may not climb, or only with the greatest difficulty. Mules with heavy packs slung on either side of them do all the carrying of goods, or perhaps sleds drawn by oxen will toil up and down the narrow stony path which leads to the town. And yet, at the foot of the cliff, there may be a pleasant green plain beside a swift river. The cows are driven down to pasture there, the women go down with baskets



A SHOP IN THE MERCATO VECCHIO,
FLORENCE. Chapters I'II, and I'III.

Among the Apennines

of clothes to wash them in the clear water ; but at night all climb up again to the fastness above. Why is this? Why was not the town built at the foot of the precipice instead of on its crest, where the houses are packed close on ledges of rock ?

The reason is that these towns were built in far-off days, when men thought of two things only in fixing upon a spot to raise their dwellings—food and safety. In order to get food, they built their homes near a patch of fertile land, which could be easily cultivated with their simple tools, and, in order to be safe, they placed their houses on the lofty rock which sprang high above the plain. Here they were secure from their enemies, and the compact mass of houses inside the strong wall, which encircled the little city, made a stout fortress. In choosing the hill-top, the early settlers always looked for one which had its own spring or fountain of water. Food is easily stored, but water not so easily, and with a good spring in the town they did not fear thirst even when a powerful enemy cut them off from the river below.

In our own country the same system may be found, or, rather, remains of the same system. Above a number of our towns there still hang hill-tops which show that old villages once stood up there. For instance, the hill-top of Old Sarum was the beginning of modern Salisbury, the height of Caer Badon was the beginning of modern Bath, and to this day hill-top towns still stand at Shaftesbury and Launceston.

Now, in England, where attack by foreign foes was not greatly feared, and where fighting at home ceased

Peeps at Many Lands

a long time ago, the people came down from the hill-top to the plain, and lived in greater comfort and convenience. But in Italy times of trouble and war and invasion lasted to far later days than with us, and so the people clung to their fortress homes. It is true that the land is quiet to-day, and yet the Italian hill-town stands on its height just the same as ever, nor do the people make any sign of leaving it. But many of them are poor, and have no means of building new homes, and many are amply satisfied with the simple things that lie within their grasp.

Modern life has left these towns untouched. Their inhabitants do not crave for trams or fine shops, or even good roads. A mule-path brought wine and oil to them centuries ago ; it brings them to-day, and the people are satisfied. Nor do they wish to get down to some highroad or railway, to stand upon a line of traffic, to be in touch with the modern hurry and scurry. Their district is self-supporting and self-contained. They live in it and for it to such an extent that they give the name of "foreigners" not only to people of other lands, but to their fellow-Italians of a neighbouring province.

The Eternal City

CHAPTER X

THE ETERNAL CITY

ABOUT 750 years before the birth of Christ a band of settlers founded a city on the banks of the River Tiber, and that settlement became Rome. Nearly twenty-seven centuries have passed since then, and Rome has been a great and charmed name through all that space of time.

Her early days were of conquest over the surrounding tribes; then her eagles flew farther and farther, and the swords of the Roman legionaries made their city the mistress of the world. Rome, upon her seven hills, was a magnificent city of splendid temples, and in her Forum met soldiers, statesmen, and Senators whose fame is as fresh to-day as when they wrote their great books or delivered their famous speeches.

Time passed, and the power of Rome sank. Her rulers became weak and corrupt, and the mistress of the world was overthrown by hordes of barbarians from the north. But after the Rome of the Cæsars came the Rome of the Popes. The city became the centre of the Christian Church, and for ages she ruled all Christendom with unquestioned sway.

The early days of Christianity in Rome were days of persecution and trial, of imprisonment and martyrdom. The new faith was looked upon as dangerous by the rulers of Rome, and so the cry arose of "The Chris-

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tians to the lions!" Where were the Christians flung to the lions? In the Colosseum, the vast building where the Romans held their games and shows. The ruins of the Colosseum still stand, one of the most famous and striking buildings in existence. It is the example, above all, of the wonderful power of the old Romans as the greatest builders the world has ever seen. It is a huge amphitheatre, where 50,000 spectators could be seated in tier above tier till the topmost row of spectators looked down 160 feet into the arena below. The arena is about 280 feet long by 174 feet wide, and here were given combats of gladiators (men hired to fight with each other), of gladiators with wild beasts, of wild beasts with each other, and of naval battles. For the latter purpose the arena was filled with water and became a lake, on which vessels were launched to engage in fight.

But there was no sight which better pleased the savage multitude than the spectacle of Christian martyrs exposed to wild beasts. The latter were kept without food until they were savage with hunger, and flew upon their victims and tore them to pieces at once. Men, women, and children suffered this cruel death under the eyes of the gazing thousands.

For hundreds of years this mighty building served as a quarry to the builders of Rome. Palaces, churches, theatres have been built from its walls, and yet it stands, immense and impressive. After a time this destruction was checked, yet one Roman Cardinal managed in 1540 to remove vast masses of quarried blocks by a cunning trick. He begged the Pope to

The Eternal City

allow him all the stones he could remove in twelve hours. The permission was given, and he set 4,000 men to the task.

Closely connected with the early Christians are the catacombs, the vast underground caverns hewn out of the rock, forming a "subterranean Rome." They are forty-five in number, and the passages, galleries, and chambers run to hundreds of miles in total length. This great underground city formed a refuge for Christians from their persecutors. Here they buried their dead; here they met for prayer and worship; here they gathered converts to instruct them in the new faith. After the time of persecution was over the catacombs were no longer used, and in time their very existence as Christian retreats was forgotten. Visitors to Rome were told that under the city lay huge and frightful caverns filled with snakes. This belief was common until explorers took the catacombs in hand, and instead of snake-haunted chasms they found galleries of tombs, rooms hollowed in the rock, with a seat for the teacher of those who had met there, inscriptions and pictures of the deepest interest, prayers and names scratched on walls, and frescoes depicting Bible scenes.

From the catacombs to the majestic Church of St. Peter there is no break in the Christian history of Rome. Popes taught and were buried in the catacombs. The Pope rules to-day over St. Peter's, the greatest Christian church in the world. St. Peter's is said to stand on the site of the tomb of St. Peter, and in the year 306 a great church was raised on the spot.

Peeps at Many Lands

The Emperor Constantine himself aided in the work, carrying twelve baskets of earth in honour of the Twelve Apostles. For a thousand years the church of Constantine held its place, then it was resolved to raise a grander building.

The foundation-stone of this, the most famous church in Christendom, was laid in 1506. Nearly two hundred years were spent in the building. The famous names of Raphael and Michael Angelo are closely connected with it: Raphael laid out the general plan, and Michael Angelo designed the vast dome, which is the greatest landmark of the city. Of a visit to St. Peter's Bayard Taylor says:

"It seemed a long time before we arrived at the Square of St. Peter's. When at length we stood in front, with the majestic colonnade sweeping round, the fountains on each side sending up their showers of silver spray, the mighty obelisk of Egyptian granite piercing the sky, and beyond, the great front and dome of the cathedral, I confess my unmingled admiration. The front of St. Peter's seemed close to us, but it was a third of a mile distant, and the people ascending the steps dwindled to pigmies. I passed the obelisk, went up the long ascent, crossed the portico, pushed aside the heavy curtain, and stood in the great nave. I need not describe my feelings at the sight, but I will tell you the dimensions, and you may then fancy what they were. Before me was a marble plain, 600 feet long, and under the cross 417 feet wide, and there were 400 feet of air between me and the top of the dome. The sunbeam, stealing through a

The Eternal City

lofty window at one end of the transept, made a bar of light on the blue air, hazy with incense, one-tenth of a mile long, before it fell on the mosaics and gilded shrines of the other extremity. The grand cupola alone, including lantern and cross, is 285 feet high, and the four immense pillars on which it rests are each 137 feet in circumference. It seems as if human art had outdone itself in producing this temple—the grandest which the world ever erected for the worship of the Living Good.”

St. Peter's is full of splendid statues and tombs, and against one of the great piers supporting the dome is a famous bronze statue of St. Peter himself. This statue has always been an object of deep veneration to the crowds of pilgrims who for centuries have thronged to the great church. The right foot has actually been worn away by the kisses of the devout.

Near at hand rises a massive range of buildings—the Vatican, the residence of the Popes. It is the largest palace in the world, or, rather, it is a collection of palaces, museums, picture-galleries, barracks, and offices covered by one name. It may also be called a prison, for the Pope stays in it as if it were a prison, and this is done to mark his displeasure with the present government. When Italy became a united nation, the power of the Pope as a reigning Italian Prince came to an end, and this was deeply resented at the Vatican. Now, the Pope does not move about in his lost possessions, but remains shut up in solitary state at the Vatican.

Peeps at Many Lands

CHAPTER XI

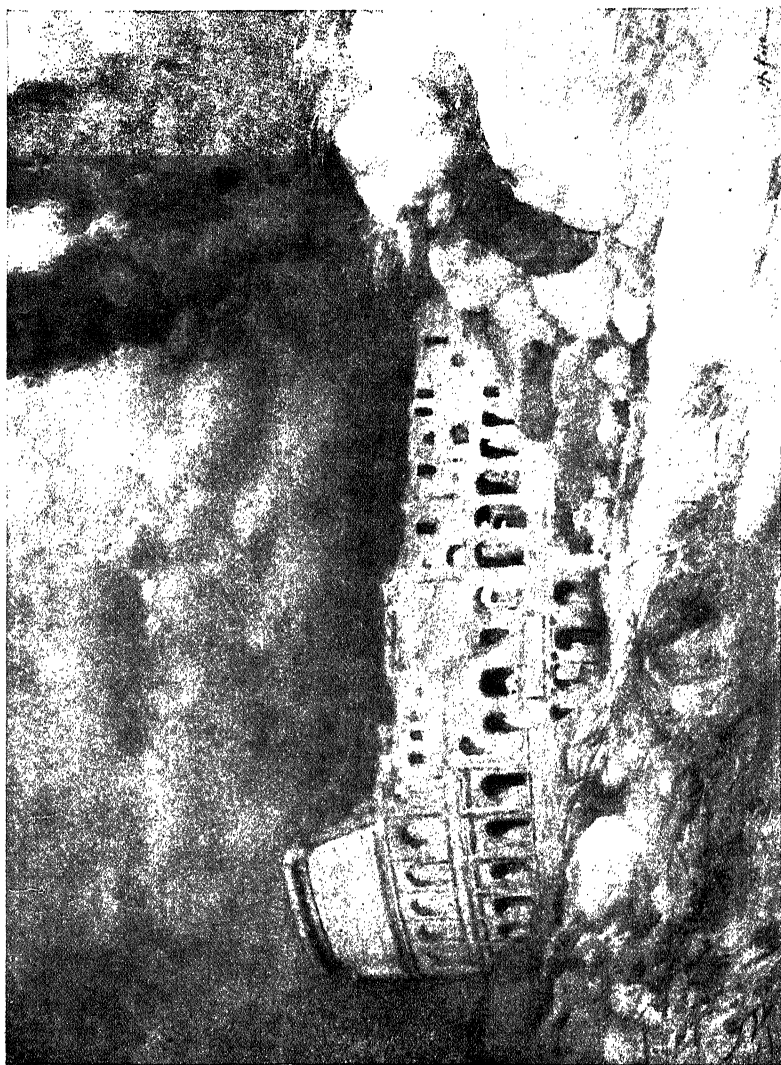
THE ETERNAL CITY (*continued*)

A VERY striking relic of Imperial Rome is the Pantheon, a splendid circular building, once a temple of the Roman gods, but since 609 a Christian church. It is the only building of the old Romans which remains entire and in use at the present day:

“Simple, erect, severe, austere, sublime,
Shrine of all saints and temple of all gods.”

This noble hall was raised by the Emperor Hadrian, but the portico is part of the original building erected by Agrippa in 27 B.C. The interior is of noble design. The circular walls are crowned by a dome of most beautiful shape, and the temple is lighted in a strange and charming fashion. Not a window breaks the surface of the walls, but at the very apex of the dome there is a circular opening 28 feet across, which lights the interior perfectly, and with the most magical effects of sun and shade. Standing on the pavement below, and looking up to the blue sky through this opening, it has the appearance of a great eye, and impresses the spectator deeply: it seems “as if heaven were looking down into the interior of the temple.”

Around the walls are niches where the images of the Roman gods once stood: they are now converted into Christian altars. In the Pantheon lies Raphael, the



THE COLISEUM IN A STORM. PAGE 42

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great painter, who died at the age of thirty-seven. It has also been adopted as the burial-place of Italian Sovereigns, and the two Kings who have died since Italy became a united nation lie within its walls.

The finest tomb of Old Rome is a modern castle. The Castle of St. Angelo, whose broad, round tower rises beside the Tiber, is one of the best-known landmarks of Rome. Yet it is but a fragment of the splendid mausoleum raised by Hadrian. The vast tomb became a castle, and for hundreds of years it was held, attacked, partly destroyed, built up again, until it stands to-day a living record of the turbulent days of mediæval Italy.

As for the relics of ancient Rome, they are found, not only in arches and pillars, but literally everywhere, in fragments. The modern city is built upon the ruins of the city of the Cæsars, when palaces of marble rose on every hand, and the most magnificent public buildings, temples, theatres, and baths were built as if intended to last for ever. But the fury of the invading barbarians overthrew most of the ancient monuments, and time has buried them deep under layers of earth and rubbish. Yet to this day fragments of the old splendour are found on every hand. "Every villa, garden, and palace staircase is peopled with ancient statues. Fragments of inscriptions, of carved mouldings and cornices, marble pillars, and antique fountains are met with in every courtyard. Even a humble house or shop will have a marble step or a marble lintel to the front door. To the present day no piece of work is ever undertaken in Rome, no house foundation dug

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or gas-pipe laid, but the workmen come across some ancient masonry, an aqueduct, whose underground course is unknown and unexplored, a branch of one of the great drains, or the immense concrete vault of a bath or temple, whose destruction gives as much trouble as if it were solid rock."

Of the ancient Roman Forum, that famous spot where Cicero spoke and the City Fathers met, some tall columns still stand, and the spade of the digger has cleared away the earth, and we may walk the very pavement which the senators trod. The Forum lies between the two famous hills of the Palatine and the Capitol. The Palatine hill was the cradle of infant Rome, and upon it were raised the huts of the shepherds who founded the city. The Capitol became the fortress and the centre whence Consuls and Senators sent decrees over the world. The Forum was at first a mere swamp, and about 603 B.C. Tarquinius Priscus built cloacæ (huge sewers) to drain off the water. So massive and so perfect was, and is, this ancient masonry that it has served its purpose for nearly 2,500 years, and serves it just as well to-day.

Through the Forum ran the Via Sacra—the Sacred Way—by which a victor marched in triumph to the Capitol. Behind the gay, triumphant train came the poor captives who had lost the day, and whose lives would be sacrificed in honour of the victory. One precipitous face of the Capitol is the Tarpeian Rock, over which traitors were hurled to be dashed to pieces at the foot of the descent.

Near at hand are the two famous triumphal arches

The Eternal City

which are still in good order, the Arch of Constantine and the Arch of Titus. The Arch of Constantine was built in A.D. 312. It is of great size and fine proportions, and is the best preserved of all the triumphal arches of Rome. It is adorned with many fine pieces of work taken from older arches, and is of deep interest as bearing the first inscription which shows that Rome had become Christian. But of even still deeper religious interest is the Arch of Titus.

After the capture of Jerusalem, Titus returned in triumph to Rome, bearing with him the spoils of the Temple, and followed by multitudes of Jewish captives. The Senate decreed that Titus should be honoured by a triumphal arch, and the latter was built at the highest point of the Sacred Way. It is a beautiful arch, but its chief interest lies in the subject of the sculptures which ornament it. For here are shown the sacred trophies torn from the Temple—the seven-branched candlestick, the table of shewbread, the silver trumpet. Another relief shows Titus himself crowned with laurels, and drawn in a four-horse chariot, while a crowd of Jewish leaders are dragged in chains beside his chariot-wheels. It is said that even to-day no Jew will walk beneath this arch, which records the destruction of his people and his Temple.

One of the oldest monuments of Rome is a prison under the Capitol, the Mamertine Prison, whose dungeons are built of huge blocks of stone. Here some of the most famous prisoners of Roman history have been shut up. In the Mamertine was starved to death Jugurtha, the great Numidian King who gave

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so much trouble to the Roman arms. He suffered about a century before Christ, and displayed the calmest fortitude in presence of his victorious foes. On one occasion, Marius, his captor, flooded the dungeon with icy water : "By Hercules !" remarked Jugurtha, "but your bath is cold."

Tradition says that the Mamertine once held the Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and a pillar is shown to which they were bound for nine months. "A hole in the wall, now protected with iron bars, is said to be the impression of St. Peter's head when he rested. This is kissed by the thousands of pilgrims who visit the prison during the annual *festa*."

CHAPTER XII

THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA

LET us leave Rome by its oldest and most famous road, the Appian Way. This splendid road is formed of immense blocks of stone laid with such perfect exactness that after nearly two thousand years of traffic the time-worn pavement is still sound and good. On either side of the causeway stand tombs, for the old Romans buried their dead and raised monuments to their memory beside the most frequented ways, as if to keep thoughts of the departed in the minds of the living. Most famous of these tombs is that of Cecilia Metella, wife of Crassus, Cæsar's Legate in Gaul. It is

The Roman Campagna

a noble tower, 90 feet high, and resembles a castle-keep. "The stern round tower of other days," as Byron calls it, is not merely one of the finest, but also one of the best-preserved of these ancient monuments.

The Appian Way runs on, and, as we follow it, we find ourselves entering a very lonely and desolate stretch of country. This is the Roman Campagna, the country about Rome. There are no trees, no human habitations, save here and there a little village whose people are white and sickly, worn with fever and consumed by disease. This sickness and desolation are caused by the malarial fever which haunts these wide swampy stretches of country.

Yet once there was no malaria to fear, and the country was smiling and fertile. It is dotted everywhere with ruins, which show that in Roman times seventy cities were scattered over the plain, and that the land between them was covered with farms and villas, the country seats of Consuls, patricians, and Senators. Excellent roads threaded the land, and inns stood at the crossings of the ways, while shrines, monuments, temples, and aqueducts were seen on every hand.

Of aqueducts we must say more, not only because their remains are the most striking of the Campagna ruins to-day, but also because they had a share in the desolating of the great plain.

No city in the world was ever better supplied with fresh water than Ancient Rome. By means of viaducts and huge stone embankments, the rivers and springs

Peeps at Many Lands

of the Sabine Hills were conducted to Rome in such abundance that there was a supply of 230 gallons daily for each inhabitant. From the city the lines of these aqueducts can still be traced, spreading across the Campagna like the threads of a spider's web, and miles of the arches still stand. Upon these arches were carried tunnels of stone, through which the water flowed to a vast reservoir, whence the fountains, baths, and private houses of Rome were supplied. One aqueduct is in use to this day, but the rest were partially destroyed by the Goths in the sixth century.

The cutting of these vast aqueducts turned the water on to the plain and flooded the Campagna; hence arose the marshes and the malarial fever which is the pest of the region. Then the raids of the barbarians drove the farmer and the vine-grower from the land, and it became still more and more a swampy desert. For there flowed down into it from the hills a thousand little brooks and rills which had been of great service for irrigation; but when the land was neglected, the streams were no longer used to good purpose, and overran the soil.

The people of the Campagna to-day are farmers and herdsmen. They watch sheep, cows, goats, and buffaloes, as the latter feed over the hills and below the ledges, where the wild-fig shows its clusters of bloom. They till the vine and tend olives, and the vintage season is the most important time of their year. The vines are grown in close groups, and the clusters of grapes are gathered in wooden vessels which narrow towards the base. The grapes are flung into a press fixed above a

The Roman Campagna

great cask, and the juice is driven out by treading with the bare feet as in Bible times.

The second great harvest is that of the olive in November or December. The fruit is gathered and pressed for its oil. The finer oil is used for cooking purposes, the coarser goes to feed the lamp, and olive logs, when the trees come down, make a splendid winter fire.

When the wine and oil are ready, they are carried to Rome in small hooded carts. Beneath the hood of linen or leather sits the driver, while his little savage dog is perched on top of the casks, and is a watchful guard both over the goods and his master. At the back of the cart there is always a tiny barrel of wine fixed crosswise. This is for the refreshment of the driver, and becomes his property when the journey is ended.

As he jogs on, he passes fields where the peasants are at work. They sing as they toil, chanting some old folk-song for hour after hour as they bend at their task. Or, across some wild, lonely upland he sees one of the *butteri* trot along—one of the herdsmen—a picturesque fellow on his rough pony which he sits with the ease and grace of a born horseman. They are wonderful men in the saddle, these herdsmen of the Campagna, and when Buffalo Bill's cowboys challenged them to a trial of skill in rough-riding they bore away the palm.

Now the wine-cart rolls by a cross hung with flowers, and the driver bends his head, for at this spot one of his comrades was killed under the wheels of the

Peeps at Many Lands

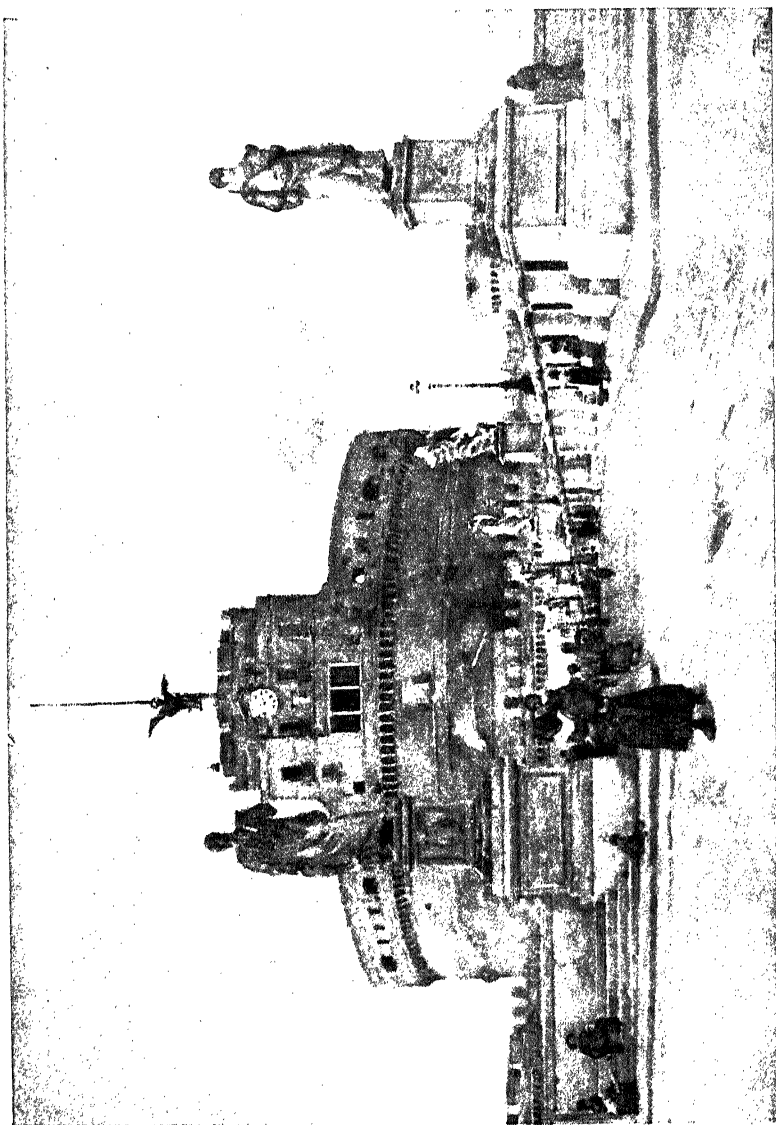
cart. Such accidents are not uncommon. During the long, lonely journey under the hot sun a man becomes drowsy, falls asleep, rolls off his cart, and is crushed under the heavy wheels, while the animals plod steadily forward on the well-known way.

CHAPTER XIII

AT NAPLES

NAPLES, the largest city of South Italy, is also the most beautiful. It stands on a bay whose shores sweep round in a noble curve, and from the water's edge rise slopes covered with the white houses and the gardens of the city. From the water it looks magnificent, and the approach by sea is far grander than any approach by land.

"What words can analyse the details of this matchless panorama, and unravel that magic web of beauty into which palaces, villas, forests, gardens, vineyards, the mountains and the sea are woven! What pen can paint the soft curves, the gentle undulations, the flowing outlines, the craggy steps, and the far-seen heights, which, in their combination, are so full of grace! No skill can catch the changing hues of the distant mountains, the playing waves, the films of purple and green which spread themselves over the calm waters, the sunsets of gold and orange, and the aerial veils of rose and amethyst which drop upon the hills from skies of morning and evening. 'See Naples and die' is a well-



HADRIAN'S TOMB, THE CASTLE OF S. ANGELO, ROME. (17th C.)

At Naples

known Italian saying, but it should read, 'See Naples and live.'"

The Neapolitans, in any case, believe in living, and living, too, in the merriest fashion. Never was a more noisy, lively race of beings than the people of Naples. They shout, laugh, sing, talk, gesticulate all day long, and far into the night. Their streets are a veritable Babel, with crowds of passengers, loungers, gossips, jokers, streams of carriages hurrying up and down, with drivers yelling and cracking their whips like madmen, while bells jingle on the harness.

The street is the true home of the Neapolitan. There he sits, works, eats, and his house is a mere shelter into which he creeps at night to sleep. He does not always do that, for in the heat of summer he loves to lie on the pavement, or in the courtyard, for the sake of the coolness. Many of them are very poor, but poverty seems softened in this land of warmth and beauty. The beggar eats his scrap of bread and an onion, and then is quite content to lie in the sun and watch the tide of life which flows without ceasing along the busy streets, or up and down the lovely shore. More, he will not work if work be offered him, and easy work, too. An artist remarks that he once called to a tattered, miserable wretch and offered him sixpence to carry his easel a few hundred yards. The beggar looked up from his bed of warm sand and declined, politely, but with the greatest firmness, and this was the true Neapolitan spirit.

The streets are not only noisy, but full of colour. The awnings are of brilliant stripes and shades ; the

Peeps at Many Lands

women love the most vivid tints in their dresses ; the paint-pot spreads its liveliest colours on stalls and shop-fronts and carriages. The animals which draw the latter are decorated in the gayest fashion for sheer love of display. A mule-train, coming into the city along the white and dusty roads, is a very striking and picturesque sight. On the back of each animal rises a column of glittering brass, surmounted by a tuft of fur, and adorned with brass nails. Between the ears is fastened a mass of soft light fur and red tassels. Bells tinkle on the trappings, and the effect of the whole is most gay and pleasing.

The streets are full of stalls piled with masses of flowers—scarlet, white, and blue—or with vegetables almost as brilliant in colour, or with eatables. The last are very numerous, and almost every other stall is frying, or boiling, or baking. The street is the general kitchen for the great mass of the people, and there they love to stand and watch the cooking of the meal they are about to eat. One stall serves macaroni, the national food ; another sells that beloved delicacy, snail soup ; another roasts chestnuts, and offers them for sale in bouquets, each chestnut spiked upon a short stick, and the customers stand or sit around, and drink or munch calmly in face of all the world.

Here and there are places to which the people crowd eagerly to look at certain numbers posted up outside in flaring figures of red, green, and blue. Such a place is a *banco lotto*, a place where lottery tickets are sold, and the passion of the people for the lottery is one of the curses of Italy. The lottery is under the control

At Naples

of the Government, which makes great sums out of the money spent on tickets.

Every Neapolitan dreams that he will, one day or another, buy a ticket which will turn out a lucky number, and win a great prize, and thus the vice of gambling receives great encouragement. Even the very poorest will stake their farthings in a share of a lottery ticket, believing devoutly in a certain set of lucky numbers which they try again and again. There is a lottery dictionary in which every event has a certain number assigned to it, and many persons use this dictionary in staking their money. In this connexion a strange but true story is told :

“A money-lender in Naples was robbed in broad daylight. His safe happened to be unlocked for the moment, and all its contents were taken, and he himself so severely wounded by the robbers that he was left for dead. When he came to, and realized that he was ruined, in despair the wretched man turned to his dictionary of lottery numbers, and put the little money remaining to him on the three numbers corresponding to an attempt at murder, theft, and unlocked safe. He won, and recovered every penny lost by his misadventure.”

This gambling on the lottery leads to a great deal of petty theft on the part of servants and clerks, just as gambling on racehorses leads to theft in England. And the mention of theft brings us easily to the Camorra, which, fortunately, has no representative among us. The Camorra is a vast secret society, composed of thieves and of those who protect them and share in the

Peeps at Many Lands

spoil. We ought rather to say, that is supposed to be a secret society, for in reality its members are well-known to the police and to many of the public. But the police never attempt to break it up—they hold it in too great a dread. The head of the Camorra is known as the “Capo Camorristi,” and his power in Naples is very great. An English writer speaks of this power in connexion with stealing dogs, a practice to which the Neapolitan thieves—members all of the Camorra—are much attached.

“A friend of ours, possessor of a valuable dog, and aware of this peculiarity, determined to take the matter courageously into his own hands. Fortunately, he knew the ‘Capo,’ the president of this strange society, and went to him for assistance.

“‘I have,’ he said, ‘a beautiful dog to which I am devoted. When I walk about the streets of Naples I have to keep him always on the chain and literally never take my eyes off him. May I appeal to your kindness to assure me of the animal’s safety?’

“He was listened to kindly. A careful note was taken of the animal’s appearance and of its owner’s address.

“‘You need have no further anxiety,’ said this quaint official of the underground world of Naples. And our friend now walks light-heartedly through the crowded streets of the town, and the dog runs wherever he pleases in safety.”

The Great Volcano

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT VOLCANO

IN every view of Naples the eye is drawn to that most striking and interesting of mountains, Vesuvius. This beautiful cone-like form, springing straight from the sea, and clear from base to summit, is capped with its ever-ascending column of smoke, and the peasants eye the great volcano uneasily. Every one has in mind its recent eruption, and dreads lest at any moment its cloud should thicken and redden, its showers of ashes and stones leap forth, its streams of lava begin to run.

An eruption of Vesuvius is a sight which inspires with awe the beholder who has nothing at stake. It fills with terror the peasantry whose farms and vineyards lie along the lower slopes and surround the foot of the mountain. The earth shakes and trembles as the tremendous fires within the mountain struggle to break forth, and a pall of smoke bursts from the crater far above and overshadows the land. From this thick veil of dark vapour pours down a heavy shower of cinders and fine ashes. From the crater run down streams of lava, molten rock. These are the two great agencies of destruction. Wherever the lava runs it destroys everything in its path with its tongue of fire, and covers fields and vineyards beneath its slow-moving stream. When it cools it is a layer of solid rock above the ruined land, which is thus buried for ever. The

Peeps at Many Lands

ashes and dust are equally destructive at the moment, but their effects are not so lasting.

The flow of a stream of lava is very slow. Even on a steep slope it scarcely seems to move. Thus there is no fear of people being overwhelmed by it. The peasant has ample time to remove his belongings from his doomed house. Sometimes a house or a village which seemed certain to be destroyed has been saved by the lava stream turning aside, as it were in mere caprice, since there appeared to be no unevenness of the ground to shape its course.

Another thing to be observed about the stream of lava is that its surface is impenetrable. It appears to be perfectly liquid, a river of fire, as it flows along. But the heaviest stones may be dashed upon it without making any impression. They will bound over its surface as a cricket-ball bounds over ice.

A visit to the crater is of deep interest, for here one sees a marvellous exhibition of the forces of nature. As you mount the cone the ground becomes hotter and hotter, and you come upon the lip of the crater with a suddenness which is startling. You find yourself on the edge of a huge bowl about half a mile in diameter and about a hundred yards deep. Upon looking into this bowl you observe that its surface is composed of stones, cinders, and lumps of lava, and is broken here and there by great holes, through which boil all the fury of the volcano.

The sight is most awful in its grandeur. The whole vast bowl is one seething mass of fire. Out of it pours a dense cloud of smoke and vapour, so thickly laden

The Great Volcano

with sulphur that a whiff of it sets you coughing. And crash upon crash, roar upon roar, heralds the successive explosions which hurl white-hot stones of every size and shape high into the air. You cannot stand still. The ground is so hot that you must move from spot to spot, or your feet begin to get unpleasantly heated.

Here and there are cracks which show you that you are really walking about on fire. Within a few inches of your boots the earth is actually red-hot. If you thrust your walking-stick into one of these cracks and hold it there for a few moments, it is charred just as in a fire. The ground about you is of many colours. There is the dull black of lava which has dried and set, there is the deep red of that which is fresh from the furnace below, there is every shade of orange and yellow, due to the presence of sulphur.

But it is the tremendous abyss below which draws your eye and holds your attention. As the pall of steam and vapour wavers to and fro, you catch glimpses of fiery chasms, whence spout the terrible fires which rage below. "Throw together all the shipwrecks, bombardments, cataracts, earthquakes, thunderstorms, railway accidents, and all terrors of the sort you can think of, and you have some representation of the uproar of sound which the eruption of a volcano offers. Take them in conjunction with the marvels of sight, and the final effect is nothing short of appalling. Take them together when the daylight is over, and the lower world can no longer be distinguished ; when the varied colouring of the ground has disappeared in the darkness, and you can see nothing but the gleam of the

Peeps at Many Lands

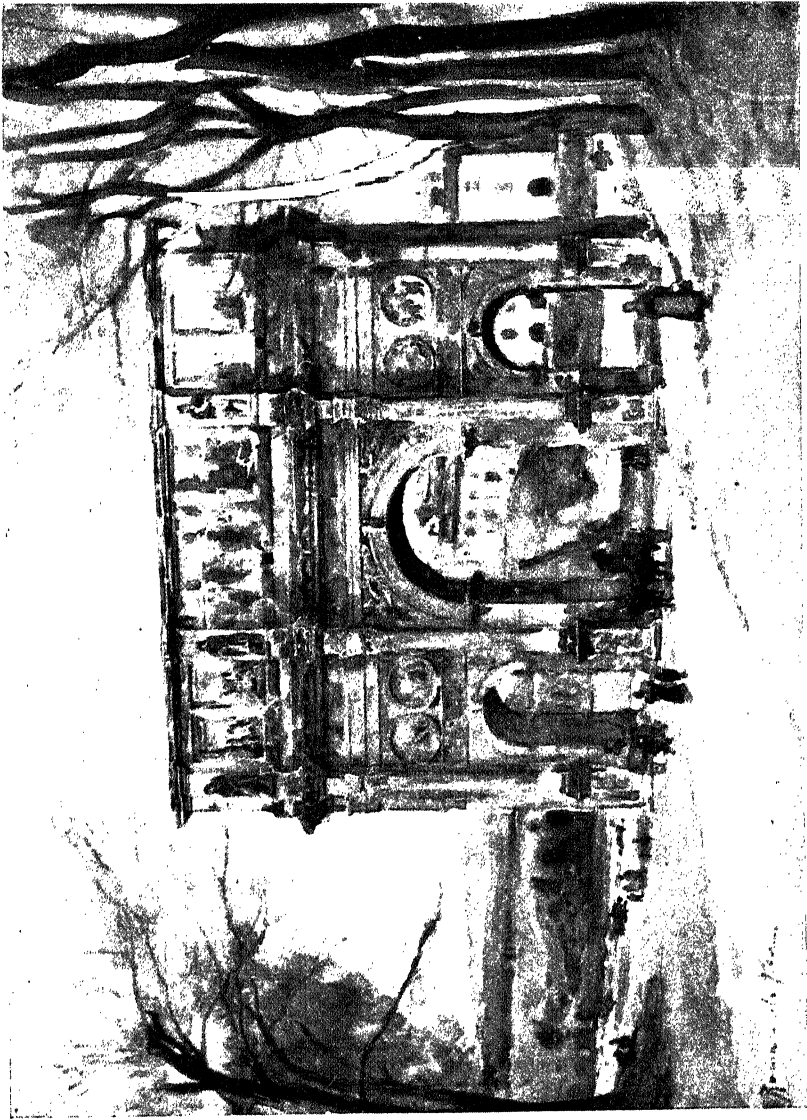
burning earth up between the minerals at your feet, the white-hot glare of the ribbon of molten lava which is gliding languidly down the mountain at your side, and in front of you the flashing of the internal fire upon the cloud of vapour overhanging the abyss, and you have a scene which is rather different from what you picture as you read that Vesuvius is once again in a state of eruption."

CHAPTER XV

THE BURIED CITIES

THE most terrible eruption of Vesuvius, which is on record, happened more than 1,800 years ago. In A.D. 79 two beautiful cities stood at the foot of the volcanic mountain. They were Herculaneum and Pompeii. Pompeii was then an old city, but was at the height of its glory, with temples, baths, and splendid villas, where wealthy Romans took their luxurious ease. On an August day, when the people were going about their work or their pleasure, suddenly there burst forth from the crater far above their heads a vast column of black smoke. It rose to an immense height in the blue sky and slowly spread abroad. As it spread it shut out the light of the sun until, at midday, the city was covered with a fearful darkness, lighted only by the flames which darted from the awful overhanging cloud.

Many fled from the place, but many stayed in their



THE ARCH OF CONSTANTINE, ROME. Page 31.

The Buried Cities

houses, expecting that the cloud of vapour would pass away. But soon a rain of ashes began to fall. First, it was but a light dust, then it grew thicker and heavier and was mingled with pumice-stones, and the streets were filled with choking sulphurous vapour. Heavier and heavier grew this dreadful rain until the streets were impassable, and those who tried to escape stumbled and fell in the clogging masses of cinders and stones, or were struck down by the heavier fragments hurled upon them.

Now, none was left alive save those who had shut themselves up closely in their houses. But the doom of even these was close at hand. With a roar like a thousand rivers in flood, streams of hot, black mud rushed down the mountain-side and overwhelmed the place. These streams filled streets, houses, cellars, underground passages, everywhere, and completed the destruction. In three days there was no sign that Pompeii had existed. It lay deep buried beneath a vast bed of ashes, stones, and mud.

So complete was the destruction that the very site passed from the memory of man. Time went on, and the rich volcanic soil threw up trees and flowers, and men built their houses and tilled their vineyards above the forgotten city. Then, about the middle of the eighteenth century, the work of excavation was begun, and Pompeii was brought to the light of day once more. But years passed before the diggers knew that it was Pompeii they were laying bare. At last an inscription was found, which settled the matter beyond doubt.

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The excavation of Pompeii has laid bare a Roman city of nearly 2,000 years ago for modern inspection. It has been said that if the eruption had been planned purposely to preserve the city, it could not have done its work more perfectly. Herculaneum was overwhelmed with lava, and the excavation of lava amounts to hewing away solid rock; but Pompeii was covered with dust and liquid mud, which formed a mould, encasing and preserving objects and human forms, and giving them up as perfect as when they were first entombed.

Nor are the pictures and inscriptions on the walls greatly injured. The frescoes, the wall-paintings are to be seen, and many of the inscriptions are of great interest. None of these can touch the visitor so much as the simple, careless records made for the work of the day and intended only for the writer's eye. On the wall of a shop the owner has noted how many flasks of wine he has sold; on the wall of a kitchen the cook has set down how much food has been prepared, and another note is made of how many tunics went to the wash, how much wool has been given out to the slaves to be spun, and other domestic details; on the wall of a house a schoolboy has scratched his Greek alphabet, and another has written a scrap of a lesson, and near at hand is an announcement of a sale by auction.

At the time of the eruption the municipal elections were going forward in Pompeii, and many of the inscriptions remind us of our methods of to-day. We cover the walls and hoardings with "Vote for Jones!" and the Pompeiian put forth his appeal in precisely the same fashion, save that he inscribed his words instead of

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printing them. One notice called upon the electors to vote for Cneius Helvetius, as worthy to be a magistrate. Pansa was another candidate, and his friends declared him to be most worthy. The supporters of Popidius begged for votes for him on the ground that he was *a modest and illustrious youth*. Poor Pompeii and poor candidates! Before the day of election came the candidates were dead or fled, and Pompeii was a lost city.

The streets of Pompeii were narrow, and most of the houses were small, but the theatres, public baths, fountains, statues, and triumphal arches were numerous and splendid. The floors of the dwellings were of mosaics; the walls were richly decorated with frescoes; and the gardens, though of no great extent, were beautifully laid out.

The excavations have yielded a vast number of most perfect examples of the tools, utensils, and ornaments of the everyday life of Pompeii. In the museum we can see the pots and pans of the kitchen, the table services of silver; the lady's dressing-table, with her ivory combs, her chains and bracelets of gold, and her thimbles of bronze; the writer's inkstand, with his pen beside it, and the tablets upon which he inscribed his notes; the toys of the children; and a host of other things.

There are also striking casts of the bodies which were found in the streets and cellars. One woman had fallen, clutching a bag of gold as she fled, and another shows two women (believed to be mother and daughter) who died side by side. In another case a mother and three children were found hand in hand.

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They were hurrying towards the city gate, but death was too swift for them. At the chief gate of the city was found a splendid example of the old Roman discipline. The sentinel stood there in his sentry-box, as he had stood through that awful day of thunderous gloom. Disdaining death, he had kept to his post and died in harness. He was found, his sword in one hand, while with the other he had covered his mouth with his tunic to keep out the poisonous fumes. Brave as the sentinel was a little dove, who had made her nest in a niche in the wall of a house. She also remained at her post, and beneath her skeleton was found the egg which she would not leave.

The excavations are still going on. At one end of the city is a hill of small stones, cinders, and fine white ashes, all easily to be moved by the spade. Beneath this hill is concealed the rest of Pompeii. A hundred labourers are at work, and an expert watches them carefully. Each find is examined, and, if valuable, is carried at once to the museum. It is expected that within fifty years the whole city will be laid bare.

CHAPTER XVI

IN SICILY

SICILY is an island of great charm and of wonderful beauty. It charms because here may be seen a people living in many respects just as they lived ages ago. Here we catch "glimpses of boats like antique galleys

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with lateen sails ; of great religious processions winding through the streets, with pikemen and torches and noblemen's retainers in the liveries of the Middle Ages ; of hermits ; of goatherds in skins playing on the pipes of Theocritus ; of villagers wearing the Albanian dress worn by their ancestors when they fled from the Turk after the fall of Constantinople 400 years ago ; of countrymen tilling the land with methods described by Virgil."

Its beauty is very striking. It is a land of noble, rocky hills crowned by villages and castles, whose dwellers look down into romantic and lovely valleys where vineyards and groves of orange and of palm are mingled with cornfields and meadows. In winter, when our land is wrapped in snow or drenched with rain, the sun is shining in Sicily, and the roses and the violets bloom, and the air is perfumed with the scent of almond-blossom and of lavender.

And yet, amid these scenes of beauty, these smiling landscapes and lovely prospects of hill and vale and blue, shining sea, there live some of the most wretched peasantry that Italy or Europe can show. Their misery is caused by the abject poverty in which they exist, and this poverty largely springs from the Sicilian land system. In many parts of the island vast estates are held by nobles or wealthy men. These landlords very rarely live on their land. They are absentees, and spend their time at Rome, Naples, or Florence, or at some large Sicilian town. The landlord lets his estate to a *gabelotto*, or middleman, and the *gabelotto* sublets the land to the peasantry or employs them to work it.

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The *gabelotto* has only one aim—to make money for himself. So he squeezes the peasant as hard as he can, either letting land to him on the severest terms, or paying him little or nothing for his labour. Villari says :

“The peasantry live in villages for safety, and go out to their work, which is often miles away, every morning. In the villages there are a few good houses belonging to the *gabelotti* of the neighbourhood, while the rest of the population, the wretched peasants, live in the filthiest and most miserable hovels. The *gabelotti* ride about the country armed and well mounted, accompanied by escorts of armed and mounted retainers, so that they are able to tyrannize over the rest of the population. The system of middlemen is indeed one of the worst plagues of the island. The misery and poverty of the Sicilian labourers are almost inconceivable. They are starved, ill-clad, silent men, hating their masters with a sullen hatred which, on occasion, breaks forth into the most savage outburst of cruelty.”

It is from this class of wild and desperate men that the Sicilian brigand springs. A man murders a landlord, or *gabelotto*, whom he hates ; then he flies to the hills to escape from the law and becomes a brigand, a highway robber whose hand is against every man. Among the mountain wilds he meets with other fugitives from the law, and they form a band which becomes a terror to the district and a menace to all peaceful travellers. Not only do they rob those who fall into their hands, but they attack houses and carry off people, and hide their captives in some wild and

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distant spot ; then they demand a great sum of money from the friends of the prisoners before the latter can be set free. Here is an account from a London newspaper of a recent piece of brigandage :

“Once again the companion of man has proved his faithfulness and cleverness, saving, if not his master’s life, a large part of his fortune. The other day, four men in the country near Girgenti, Sicily, gained entrance to a house by representing themselves as having been shooting all day, and consequently being very thirsty. Once inside, they produced their revolvers, and confronting the sole occupants, who happened to be two young brothers, they tied one to a chair and took the other prisoner, leaving a letter on the table demanding 40,000 francs (about £1,600) for the return of the boy. They took him to a cave in the hills, and, guarding the entrance, soon made as merry as circumstances permitted.

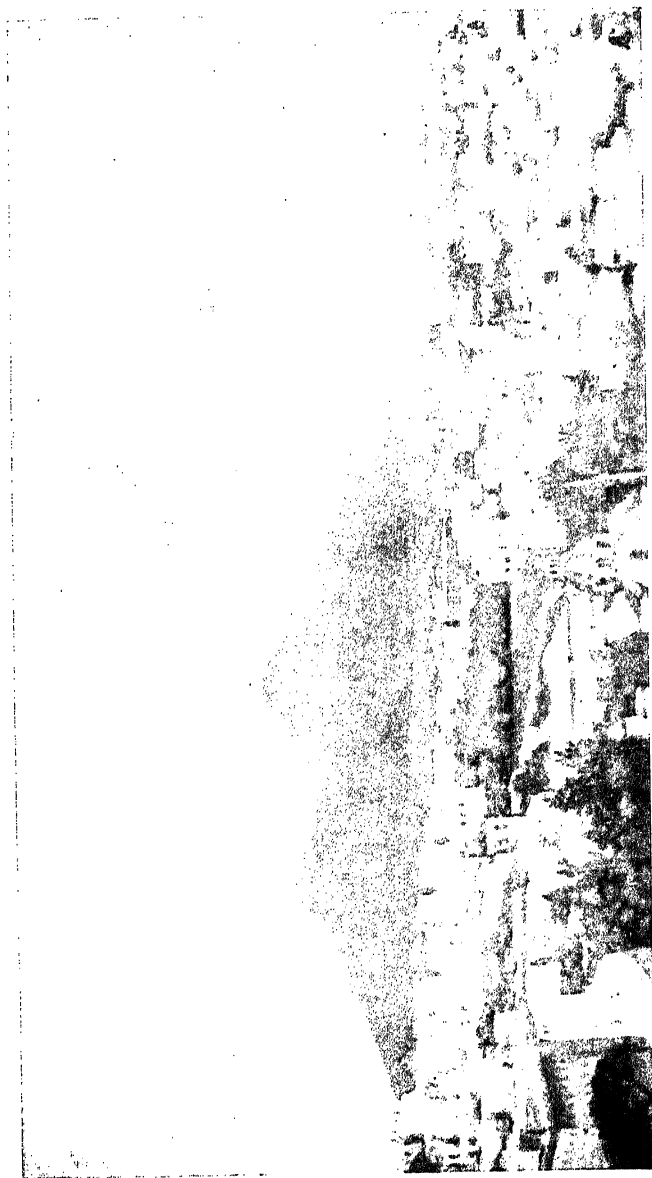
“Meanwhile the boy became aware that his pet dog, who had been allowed to accompany him, was busy digging a hole, as he thought ; but soon daylight was to be seen, and he understood that that was a way out. The faithful little animal worked on for some hours, by which time there was a hole big enough for his master to push through. The brigands were blissfully ignorant, and only woke to the true position of affairs when they were confronted by the carabinieri and their late victims, and even yet in prison they are wondering how that boy got out.”

The carabinieri are a picked body of armed police whose duty is to guard travellers upon dangerous roads.

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The carriage of the tourist is perhaps rolling quietly along when suddenly, as if springing from nowhere, two splendid mounted figures close in behind and trot after the vehicle. They are a pair of fine stalwart fellows clad in a uniform of blue and red, with white belts and glittering rifles in their hands, and riding good horses. They follow for some distance, then salute, wheel their horses, and walk gently back: they have reached the limit of their patrol. The traveller now looks uneasily at the wild, lonely slopes above and around him, and it is with a sensation of relief that he sees the next pair slip round a rock or out of a ravine and trot steadily after him.

Even more wretched than the lot of the peasants who work in the fields is that of many of those who work in the sulphur-mines. The labour of mining the sulphur is hard and poorly paid, but the miner is fortunate in comparison with the carrier who bears the blocks of sulphur from the mine to the open air. These carriers are boys, often mere children of seven, eight, or nine years of age, and from two to four work for each miner. As a class the miners are hard taskmasters, and treat their slaves with great brutality. The word "slaves" is almost literally correct, for the miners purchase these children from their parents. When a miner takes a carrier into his employment he pays the parent a sum varying from fifty shillings to ten or a dozen pounds. This binds the boy to his service until the money is paid back. The money is never paid back, so the transaction is to all intents and purposes a purchase pure and simple.



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This child-labour is most inhuman, and the tasks put upon these boys, and the vile usage they receive at the hands of the brutal miners, have caused many Italian writers to denounce the system in the strongest terms. One of the latter writes :

“ They have to descend the tortuous passages where the air is fearfully hot and reeks with poisonous sulphur fumes ; they are given loads weighing on an average 70 pounds or more, which they have to carry for distances ranging between 100 and 200 yards. As it is very hot in the mines, they work stark naked ; but they must also carry their loads for some distance in the open air, where in winter the thermometer falls below freezing-point. These boys work from seven to eight hours in the mines, or from ten to twelve in the open air, always carrying burdens far above their strength. They walk slow-footed, bent double by the crushing load, moaning, crying, or invoking the help of the Virgin and the saints.”

CHAPTER XVII

IN SICILY (*continued*)

MANY a Sicilian is born in a tomb, spends his life in a tomb, and finally dies in it, though he does not then remain there, for it is wanted once more for the living. Why does he dwell in a sepulchre ? His reason is good : he is too poor to live anywhere else.

The people of former ages, and, above all, the
IT.

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Greeks who once lived in the island, never built a tomb. They hewed their last resting-places out of the solid rock, and to this day the tombs are there just as they were shaped long ago. The poor Sicilian of to-day takes a tomb, puts his simple belongings into it, and stays there in great content. If he can hit upon a tomb of the time of the Roman Empire, he will make himself very comfortable ; for those old Romans, who dug, and built, and shaped things to last for ever, were in the habit of hewing out a most capacious tomb, and sometimes a series of tombs opening from one to the other. In each burial chamber is a broad stone shelf on which a burial urn once stood. The modern Sicilian spreads his bed upon it, and seats himself on the stone benches cut around the walls.

These tomb dwellings are usually found on the outskirts of towns, and are often inhabited by farm-labourers. That is one of the odd things of Sicily : the farm-labourer is often a townsman, not a countryman. So unsafe is the open country in some parts of the land that it is deserted by night. The labourer walks or jogs on a donkey away to his home in the town miles off, and comes back to work in the morning.

When he is at home he spends but little time in his house. For the poor Sicilian, as for every other South Italian of his standing, the street is his sitting-room. Here he spends his spare time, chatting with his friends and watching the passers-by. There is plenty to see, for the streets of a Sicilian town are never quiet for a moment. Here comes a flock of goats. It

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pauses, and one of them is detached from the herd and driven into a door near at hand, where it nimbly climbs the stairs to a room where a customer lives. Here it is milked, for no customer will trust milk which is not fresh drawn before her eyes. The goat skips back to the street, and the herd moves on.

Men with fish and vegetables for sale come along bawling their wares, and are arrested by shrill cries from far aloft. It is a customer on the top story of a tall house. She lets a basket down by a cord, and screams her wishes. The seller takes her money from the basket, puts in her purchase, and she hauls up the basket. The water-seller comes along crying his ware. In this hot and thirsty land he does a great trade in selling draughts of water, flavoured with some kind of essence, at a halfpenny each. After him marches the dealer in dried beans and nuts, and the man who has a stove and a store of queer food in his basket. This wandering cook is in great demand. He is constantly called upon to open his basket and set his stove going while his patrons watch him at work, and devour course after course as he sets it before them. Each course has a fixed price: it is one halfpenny; and a dinner of six courses runs to the sum of threepence, and makes an ample meal for the moderate Sicilian.

A specimen dinner might consist first of a halfpenny-worth of sea-urchins and a halfpennyworth of chestnut soup, then a plate of fish (not very fresh, perhaps, but that is nothing to a Sicilian palate), then artichokes boiled in oil, followed by fried maize and a slice of meat (the manner in which the animal came by its

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death is a trifle uncertain, but that is not worthy of attention), and ending with dessert—a handful of cherries and strawberries, or an orange and some dates. A wealthy customer has a halfpennyworth of wine to wash it all down, but the more frugal are content with water.

The carts that roll along the street form a sight in themselves, for the Sicilian cart is less a cart than a picture-gallery. The panels are filled with pictures painted in the gayest and brightest of colours, and the subjects vary from Bible pictures to a portrait of the latest brigand who has made himself famous. A devout carter passes whose vehicle is adorned with figures of saints and pictures of martyrdoms. The next is a worldly fellow who has decked his panels with ballet-girls and comic subjects, and next comes a cart painted with historical scenes, showing Roger, Count of Sicily, cutting down hordes of Saracens; or William Tell shooting at the apple; or Columbus setting out on his famous voyage. A driver with a poetical turn decorates his cart with scenes from the great Italian poets.

The cart itself is simply a large square box on two high wheels. There are no seats in it, and it is used for every kind of work. If it has to carry people, benches or chairs are placed in it, and a most astonishing crowd manage to pack themselves away in the affair. Fourteen or fifteen people form a common load for a Sicilian cart, and one ass slowly jogs along with this remarkable freight.

When the benches are out of the cart the latter is

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ready to receive a huge load of sulphur, or furniture, or dung, or anything and everything its owner has to carry. The load is always huge, and the hardy ass manages to haul it along, however big it may be. When the day's work is over, the faithful donkey goes home with his master, and very often not to a stable, but to a corner of the family sitting-room. The poor Sicilian thinks that what is good enough for him is also good enough for his ass or mule, and a single apartment is often shared by the family and their possessions of a donkey, a pig, a dog, and a crate of fowls.

The fowls always live in a crate so that they may not stray away, and be lost or stolen. In the morning the crate is lifted out into the sunshine. At evening it is lifted back into the house, and that is all the change the fowls ever know. The dog is, of course, a close friend of the family, and goes with them everywhere, even to church. It is a very common sight in a Sicilian church to see the dogs stretched beside their owners at service, and they behave themselves in the most correct fashion. This cannot always be said of the children, for the latter often make a playground of the church, and romp about while service is going on. One writer speaks of seeing a little boy trundling an iron hoop over the stone flags of a church floor while a solemn service was being held, and of other boys sailing paper boats in the holy-water vessel in a cathedral, and no one interfered with them.

Nor is the dog always the meek and mild creature he appears. By day nothing could be more harmless

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than the Sicilian dog. Half a dozen children pull him to and fro by his ears and hair, and he does not protest. The stranger passes by, and he does not give a single yelp. But at night he is a very different fellow. He rouses himself and goes on guard. He bares his teeth, and his hair bristles. He is a wolf-dog, true brother of the savage wolves which still haunt the great mountain of Etna, and make raids upon the flocks. He is ready to tear to pieces any stranger that comes near the fold or home which he watches.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOME LIFE IN ITALY

IN England home life is a matter of the first importance. The Englishman's house is his castle in a very literal sense, and in our cold climate he needs its protection and comforts so much that he naturally thinks a very great deal of it. In Italy things are quite different. The Italian sleeps in his house, and sometimes eats there, but he passes so much time outside—in the streets, in the café, at the theatre—that he troubles little about "the comforts of home."

The upper classes live in vast palaces, very stately and grand perhaps, but far too big to be made comfortable, particularly in winter. Then one shivers in a great bare carpetless apartment, with a chilly marble floor, dotted with a few rugs, and at one side a small

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fireplace with a smaller fire, most of the heat going up the cavernous chimney. If you find the warmth insufficient you are supplied with a *scaldino*, a small vessel of metal or earthenware, in which is a handful of hot cinders, and at this you may warm your hands. But in summer the same rooms are cool and delightful.

The size of the rooms in these old Italian palaces is wonderful. "In one palace in Florence the drawing-room is so enormous that one corner is used as a billiard-room, with a full-sized table; another part is devoted to music, and is occupied by a concert grand; another part is the hostess's boudoir; and all the rest serves as an ordinary reception-room. When a dance is given the carpet is partly rolled up, some of the furniture is pushed aside, and there is a ballroom ready for use. Roman houses are even larger."

Rich and poor often live close together in a very odd fashion in Italy. It is not merely that the palace and the hovel stand side by side; they very often do that, and, more, they are very often under one roof.

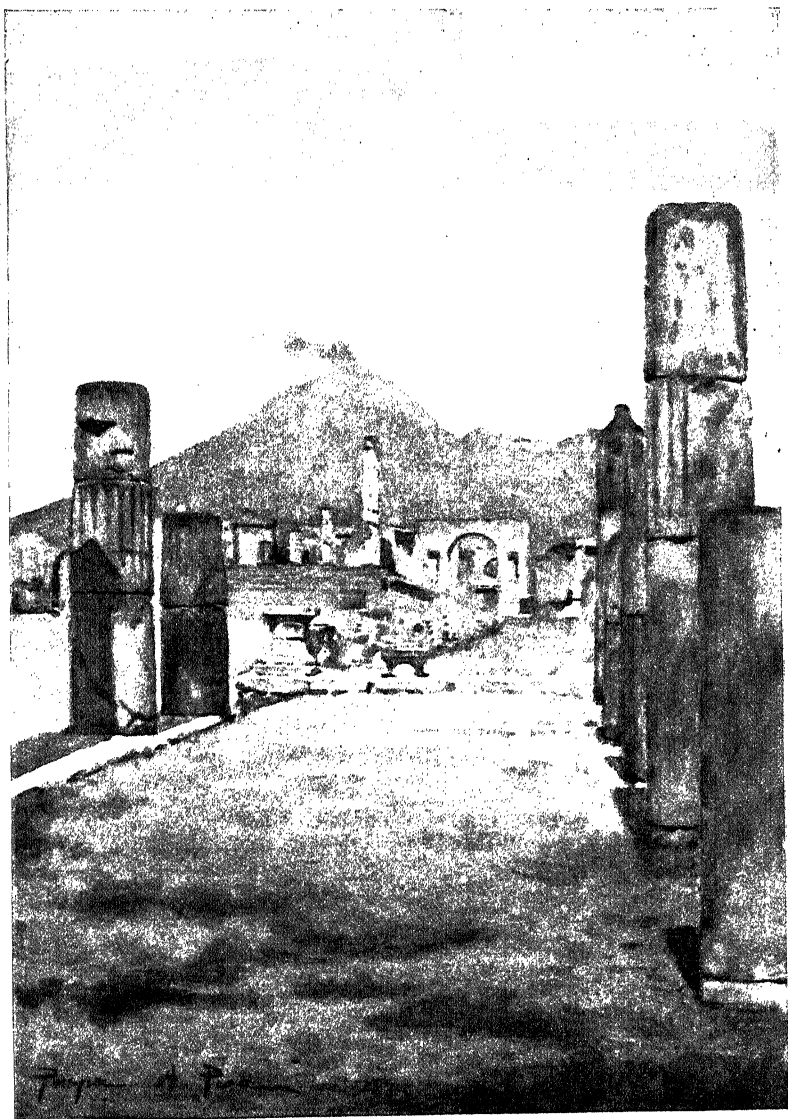
A great house is divided into flats, each occupying one story. The finer parts of the building are often inhabited by people of great wealth, while the garrets above and the cellars below swarm with wretched creatures, who often have not enough to eat. "The latter see splendid equipages drive up to their own doors, as it were, every day, and costly viands brought upstairs for great banquets. At night they see ladies glittering with jewels enter the house, and hear the strains of dance music, while they themselves are starving above and below. It is Mayfair and White-

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chapel in the same building. Nowhere is there a rich quarter inhabited by the rich alone, nor a poor quarter containing no good houses. The slums invade all parts of the town, and sometimes are found near the gates of the Royal Palace itself."

"In the country it is the same: the nobleman's villa is surrounded by the houses of his *contadini*. In Tuscany, where the labourers and farmers are better off, the contrast is not so striking or painful; but in the South one often comes across a fine castle, furnished with comfort, and even luxury, the sideboard bright with silver-plate, the walls covered with silk and tapestry and good pictures, placed in the midst of a filthy village of the most miserable hovels, in which men, women, and children live and starve together with pigs and cattle. All this contributes to embitter the feelings of the poor towards their masters, which often degenerates into unforgiving hatred, and the landlords have only their armed retainers, who are little better than bravos, to depend on for their personal safety."

People of the middle classes live either in small houses or in a flat of some great house let off in blocks of apartments. One room, the drawing-room, is very gaudy, the rest are carelessly furnished, and, to English eyes, rather untidy. This is often caused by the lack of domestic help, for servants are few, because there is no money to pay for them. The salaries of professional men are much smaller in Italy than in England. A man who makes from £200 to £300 a year is looked upon as very well off. A country doctor makes less than £100 per annum. A town doctor in good practice



A STREET IN POMPEII. Page 64.

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will run up to £300. A fairly successful barrister makes about the same. But in both professions there are vast numbers who live from hand to mouth, and earn very little in a twelvemonth. Government officials are also poorly paid, but there is great competition for an official post, as the work is light and the money sure. To put the matter in a nutshell, the average incomes of the two countries may be contrasted: the average income of an Englishman is £31; the average income of an Italian is £7 16s. 8d.—about one-fourth.

The Italian of the middle class never eats more than two real meals a day. When he awakes he drinks a cup of coffee and milk, perhaps with a piece of bread-and-butter, perhaps not. His first meal comes between ten and twelve, and is a substantial luncheon, when he eats eggs and macaroni, a dish of meat served with vegetables, and ends with cheese and fruit. With this meal he drinks wine, which is, of course, the national drink, and accompanies every meal among rich and poor. After lunch he takes a rest before resuming his occupation, and in summer this rest becomes the siesta, when every one dozes through the heat of the day.

He does not take tea, which, as a rule, he looks upon as a medicine, and his next meal is dinner, eaten about six o'clock. The order of the dinner is much the same as in England, but there is one great difference in the fact that almost every eatable is cooked in oil. This is not so bad if the oil be excellent, sound olive-oil, but at times it is rancid, and then the result is far from tasty to an English palate. Again, the favourite condiment is garlic, and to a stranger a little of this

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goes a very long way. Nor, if you are invited to an Italian dinner, can you dodge anything. Your hosts press every dish upon you and every different wine. To refuse, and to persist in your refusal, would give offence. It is as much as to say that you do not think much of their dinner.

"Children," says Villari, "are a very conspicuous feature of family life. They are here, there, and everywhere, and are not only seen, but heard. There is no such place as a nursery in an Italian household. As soon as the children are old enough to sit on a chair they live with their parents the whole day long. When the lady of the house has company, her offspring are generally with her, and are allowed to sprawl over the guests, and, if they can talk, they frequently interrupt their elders or contradict them. Children of six dine with their father and mother, and remain up until ten or eleven o'clock. Babies are sometimes taken to the theatre, and children of five quite often."

Everywhere in Italy children are humoured to the top of their bent, and the baby is king of all. "Every one makes way for a child. Parents, in their love and care for the babies, become gentlemen and gentlewomen. Harsh voices are softened for a baby's ear ; the price of sweets is lowered by the veriest Jew of a street vendor; and more than one handsome, lawless brigand has been known to come down from his mountain fastness, stride through the neighbouring town, and, at the risk of his life, demand that his child shall be baptized."

The Italian Peasant

CHAPTER XIX

THE ITALIAN PEASANT

THE Italian peasant has, upon the whole, a very hard time of it. It is true that his lot is softened to a certain extent by the blue sky, and the warm sun in which he basks for a great part of the year, but even in Italy the sun does not always shine. When the cold winds blow from the Apennines, and the frost and snow descend upon him, his poor house is very often bleak and comfortless, and his scanty fare is insufficient to keep him in health.

As a rule, the peasant is very poor. In many parts of Italy the land is so poorly tilled that the best is not made of its powers, and then taxes are very heavy. The Italian peasant—above all, the peasant farmer—is a patient, hard-working fellow. His manners are excellent, and he is always ready to show kindness to a stranger. If his farm lies in a hilly part of the country, his powers of steady labour are seen to the full. He cuts the hill-side into terraces for his olives and vines; he patiently scrapes all the good earth together into patches, and brings a little mountain brook along the cliff in a channel hewn from the rock, to water his thirsty plants.

In the autumn he is very busy in the chestnut-grove collecting the brown-coated, shining nuts. In many parts of Italy chestnuts form a large part of the peasant's food. Not only does he roast them, but he dries them,

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grinds them into meal, and mixes them with rye or maize to make bread.

The Italian peasant is seen at his best in Tuscany, where the land system favours him in the disposal of his labour. "If one goes to a Tuscan town on market-day, when the farmers of the neighbourhood come in to sell their produce, in the crowds of peasants with their dark-brown, handsome faces, their intelligent expressions, their fairly prosperous appearance, and their stalwart frames, one sees the Italian rural classes at their best."

On a large estate in Tuscany the owner and the peasant farmer are partners. The estate is divided into a number of farms, and the latter, as a rule, run to some thirty acres each. The peasant works the farm, and the produce is divided between the landlord and himself. The oxen on the farm are owned jointly, and in all respects the interests of landlord and tenant are in common. The system works well, for the tenant regards himself as part proprietor, and does his very best both for himself and his master. The latter pays all taxes, and, in case of a bad harvest, advances enough grain to the former to keep him until the next harvest, when the corn is repaid.

In Northern Italy the farms are let upon rent much the same as in England, though in some parts there are numbers of peasant proprietors, who cultivate their own land and are fairly well off.

In Southern Italy and in Sicily the peasants are seen at their worst. The farms are mostly worked by hired labour, or let to small farmers. There are a great number of labourers, and their condition is most

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wretched. Their wages are very low, their work is very hard, and their homes are miserable hovels. Owing to their unhealthy dwellings, and the poor, unwholesome food they eat, they often suffer from a dreadful disease known as the pellagra. A victim of the pellagra is attacked by it at first in the summer, and is free from it in the winter; but the intervals of freedom shorten as the malady gains power, until the unhappy victim wastes away to a state of extreme feebleness, and his skin is affected in such a fashion that he looks more like a horrible withered mummy than a man. It is fortunate when his sufferings are ended by death. This disease is also common in the vast rice swamps which are found in the east of the Lombard Plain, and near Venice.

In consequence of their great poverty, large numbers of the peasantry leave their homes to seek employment in other lands. They are welcomed everywhere by employers. They are obedient and hard-working. Wherever any great bridge-building or railway-laying is going forward, there are found swarms of Italian labourers. They are very careful and frugal. They live very simply, and out of the smallest wage always save something to send home. "The men are ready to starve to put something aside for the women and children," says Villari. But, on the other hand, they are not welcomed by the labouring classes of the country to which they go. The Italian will live so cheaply that he is willing to take small wages, and so wages are reduced all round. Then, as a rule, he is very ignorant, and his fondness for using a knife

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makes him both feared and hated. Italy is the country of the knife. It is drawn upon slight provocation, and often severe wounds or death results from a small quarrel.

The Italian peasant is very superstitious. He believes in a vast number of mysterious things—in ghosts, witches, spells, werewolves, and, above all, in the evil eye. The peasant is not alone in the latter belief. Throughout Italy are to be found vast numbers of all classes who believe firmly in the evil eye. They hold that certain persons can do evil to, or bring evil upon, others by merely looking at them. They say that the person having this unpleasant power may sometimes exert it without willing to do so. The only thing to make yourself safe is to get out of his way, but if that be impossible, to make the sign which will protect you from the threatened harm.

The sign is to form the figure of a pair of horns pointing downwards. This is done by thrusting out the first and little fingers, and closing the rest into the hand. In some parts of Italy this gesture is universal. It is not only used when meeting a jettatore, or caster of the evil eye, but is made at once if jostled in the street by a passer-by, or upon catching the eye of any stranger. Charms and amulets of the same shape are worn by children or fastened upon animals to throw off this fascination of the evil eye.

Many other superstitions are connected with diseases. If you stammer, keep a pebble in your mouth, and you will be cured; if you have a bad cold, sniff up some coal-dust; and if you have a sore throat, then tie a stock-

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ing—and take care that it is a dirty stocking—round your throat. It is believed that you may cure almost any disease by collecting the oil which drips from the framework on which church bells are hung, and rubbing it on the affected place, and another favourite remedy is to boil a skein of twine and jump three times upon it.